

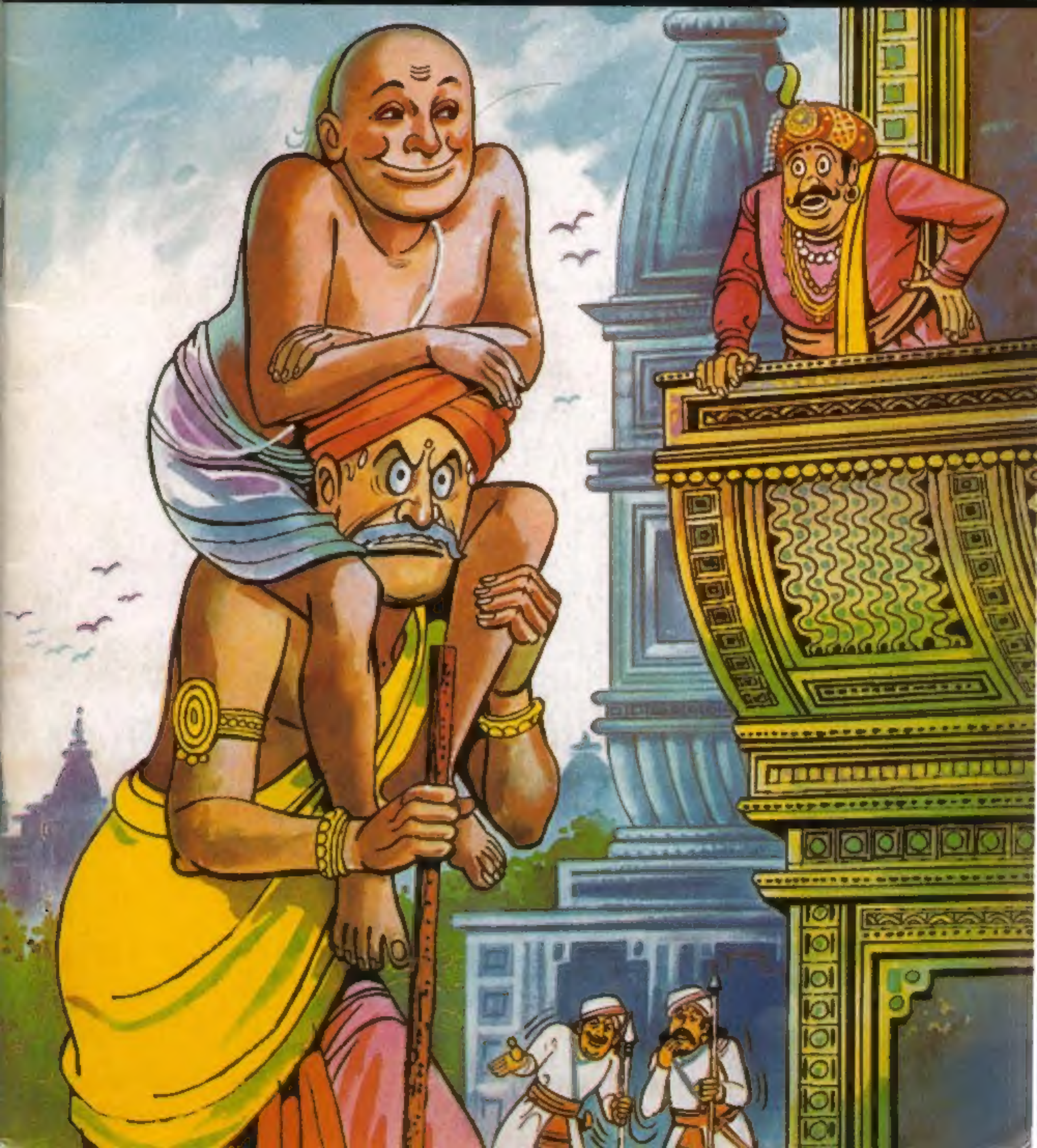


# RAMAN OF TENALI

THE BIRBAL OF THE SOUTH

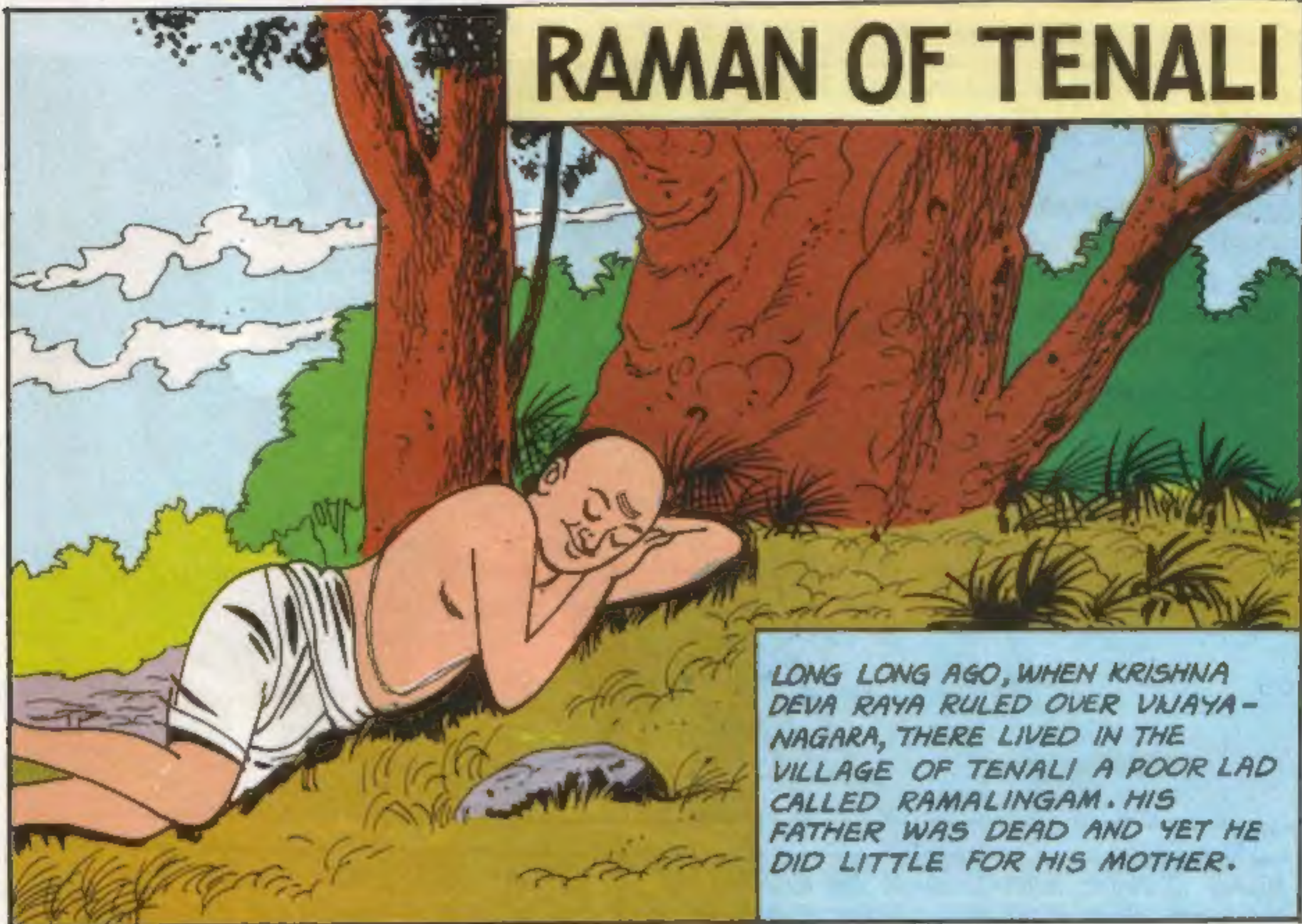
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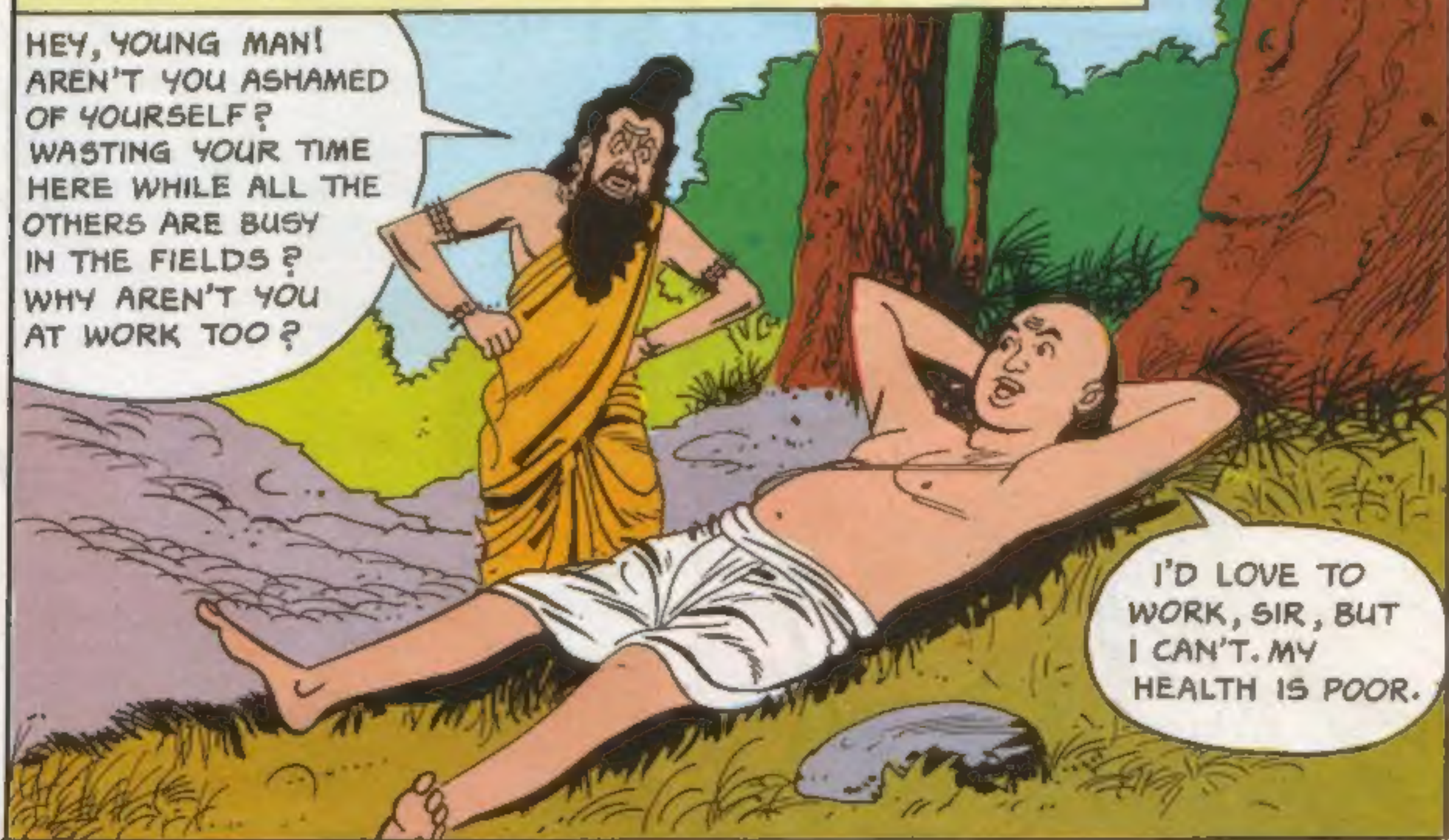
# RAMAN OF TENALI



LONG LONG AGO, WHEN KRISHNA DEVA RAYA RULED OVER VNAYA-NAGARA, THERE LIVED IN THE VILLAGE OF TENALI A POOR LAD CALLED RAMALINGAM. HIS FATHER WAS DEAD AND YET HE DID LITTLE FOR HIS MOTHER.

ONE DAY, HE WAS IDLING AS USUAL UNDER A TREE WHEN —

HEY, YOUNG MAN!  
AREN'T YOU ASHAMED  
OF YOURSELF?  
WASTING YOUR TIME  
HERE WHILE ALL THE  
OTHERS ARE BUSY  
IN THE FIELDS?  
WHY AREN'T YOU  
AT WORK TOO?



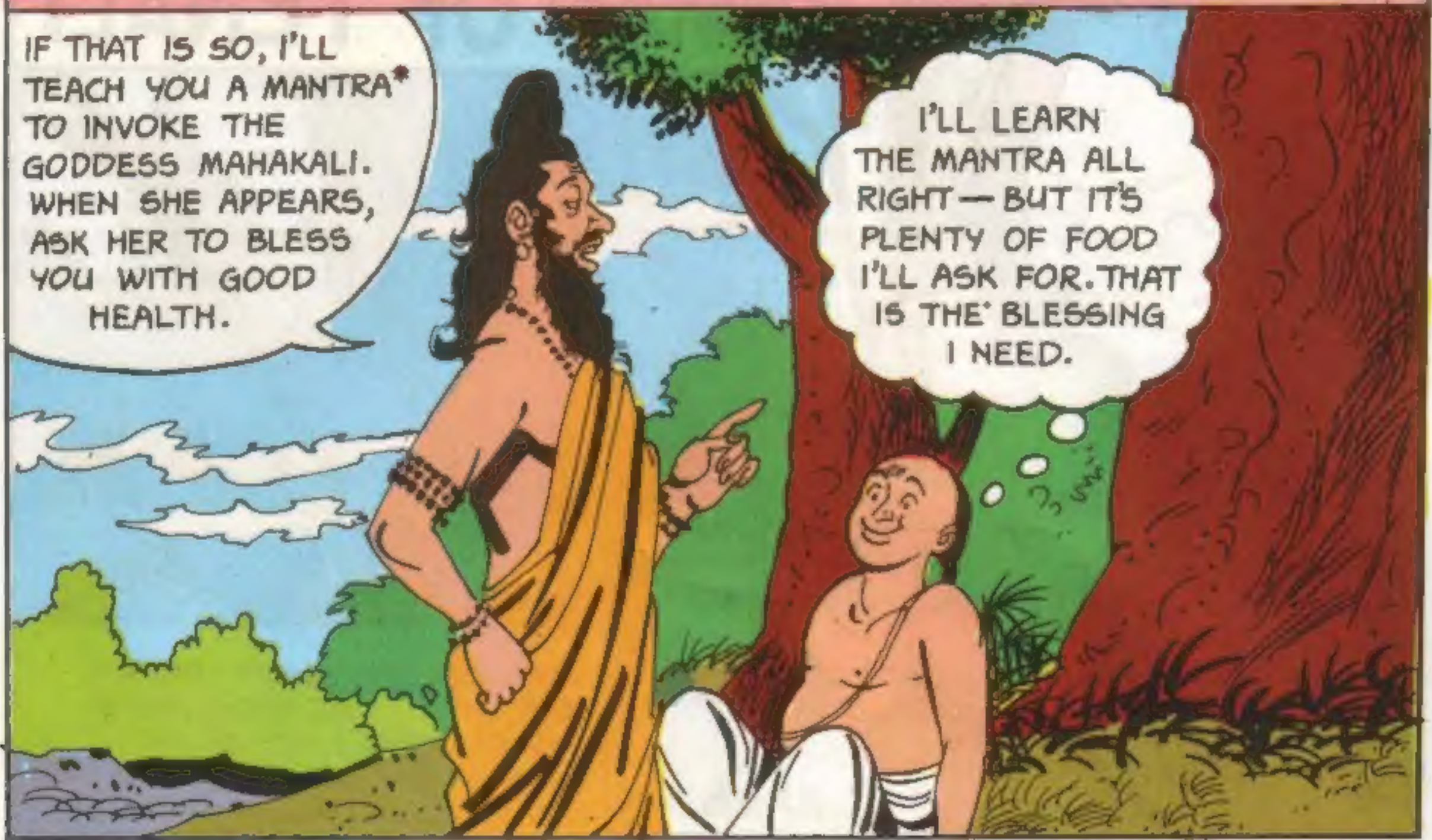
I'D LOVE TO  
WORK, SIR, BUT  
I CAN'T. MY  
HEALTH IS POOR.



IT WAS A LIE BUT THE SADHU BELIEVED HIM. HE FELT SORRY FOR THE YOUTH.

IF THAT IS SO, I'LL  
TEACH YOU A MANTRA\*  
TO INVOKE THE  
GODDESS MAHAKALI.  
WHEN SHE APPEARS,  
ASK HER TO BLESS  
YOU WITH GOOD  
HEALTH.

I'LL LEARN  
THE MANTRA ALL  
RIGHT — BUT IT'S  
PLENTY OF FOOD  
I'LL ASK FOR. THAT  
IS THE BLESSING  
I NEED.



BEING CLEVER, RAMALINGAM OR RAMAN AS  
HE WAS KNOWN, SOON LEARNT THE MANTRA.

GOOD! NOW GO TO THE  
TEMPLE TONIGHT. SIT BEFORE  
THE IDOL AND REPEAT THE  
MANTRA A HUNDRED THOUSAND  
TIMES. THE GODDESS WILL  
THEN APPEAR.

AS YOU  
SAY, SIR.

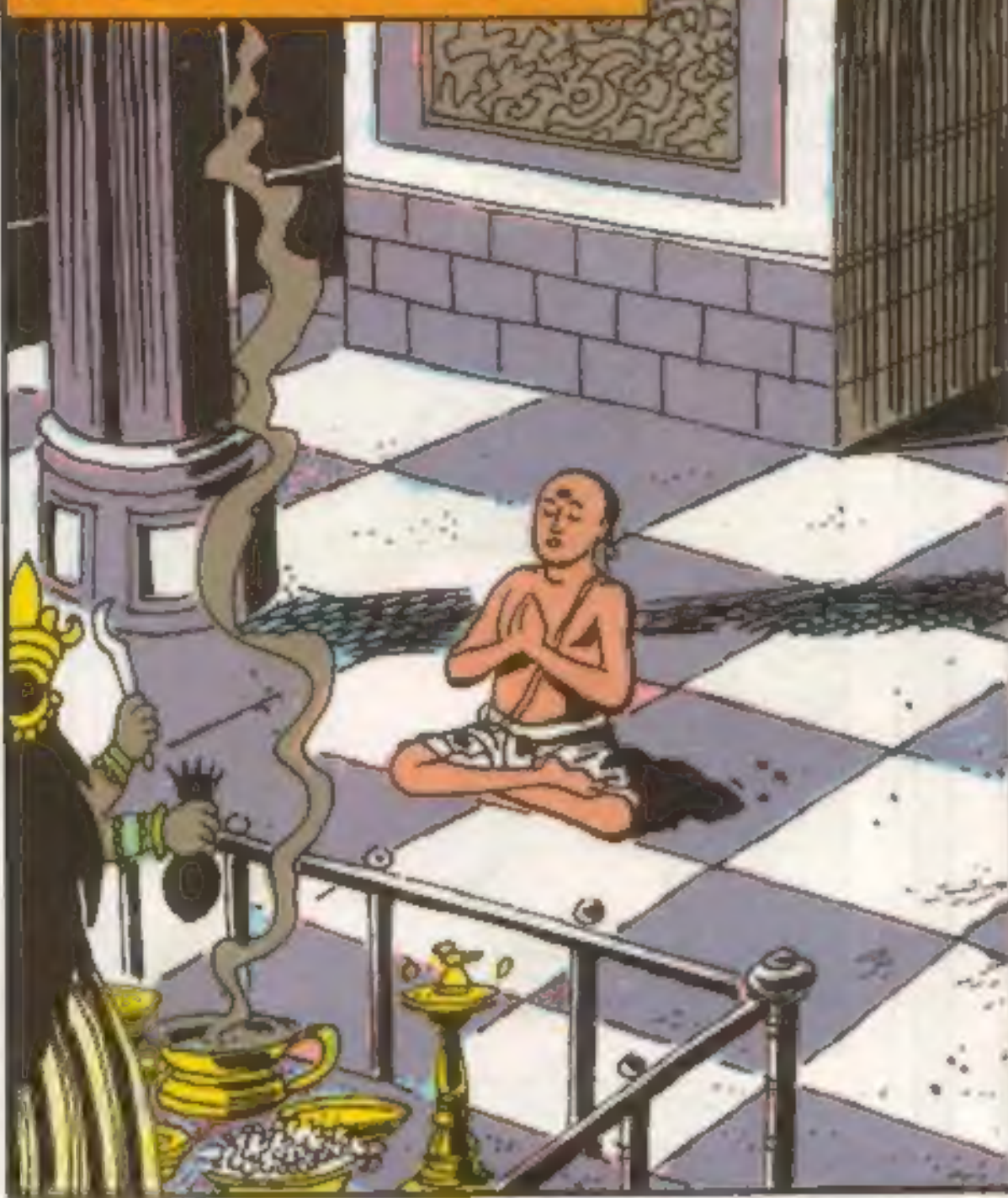


THAT NIGHT, MUTTERING THE  
MANTRA TO HIMSELF, RAMAN  
RAN TO THE TEMPLE.





HE CLOSED THE DOOR AND BEGAN REPEATING THE MANTRA.



AFTER HE HAD DONE SO FOR THE HUNDRED THOUSANDTH TIME —



I AM PLEASED.  
I WANT TO  
BLESS YOU.



IT WAS THE GODDESS! THE MOMENT RAMAN SAW HER, A FUNNY THOUGHT OCCURRED TO HIM AND HE BEGAN TO LAUGH.



HO! HO! HO!  
HA! HA! HA!  
HO! HO! HO!



THE GODDESS WAS FURIOUS AT THIS IRREVERENCE.

IMPERTINENT BOY!  
HOW DARE YOU!  
STOP THAT LAUGHTER  
AT ONCE!



HO!HO! FORGIVE ME,  
GODDESS! BUT --I COULD  
NOT STOP THIS ONE NOSE  
WHEN I HAD CAUGHT A  
COLD. WHAT WOULD YOU  
DO, I WONDERED, IF YOUR  
THOUSAND NOSES RAN!



THE GODDESS COULD NOT HELP BEING  
AMUSED.

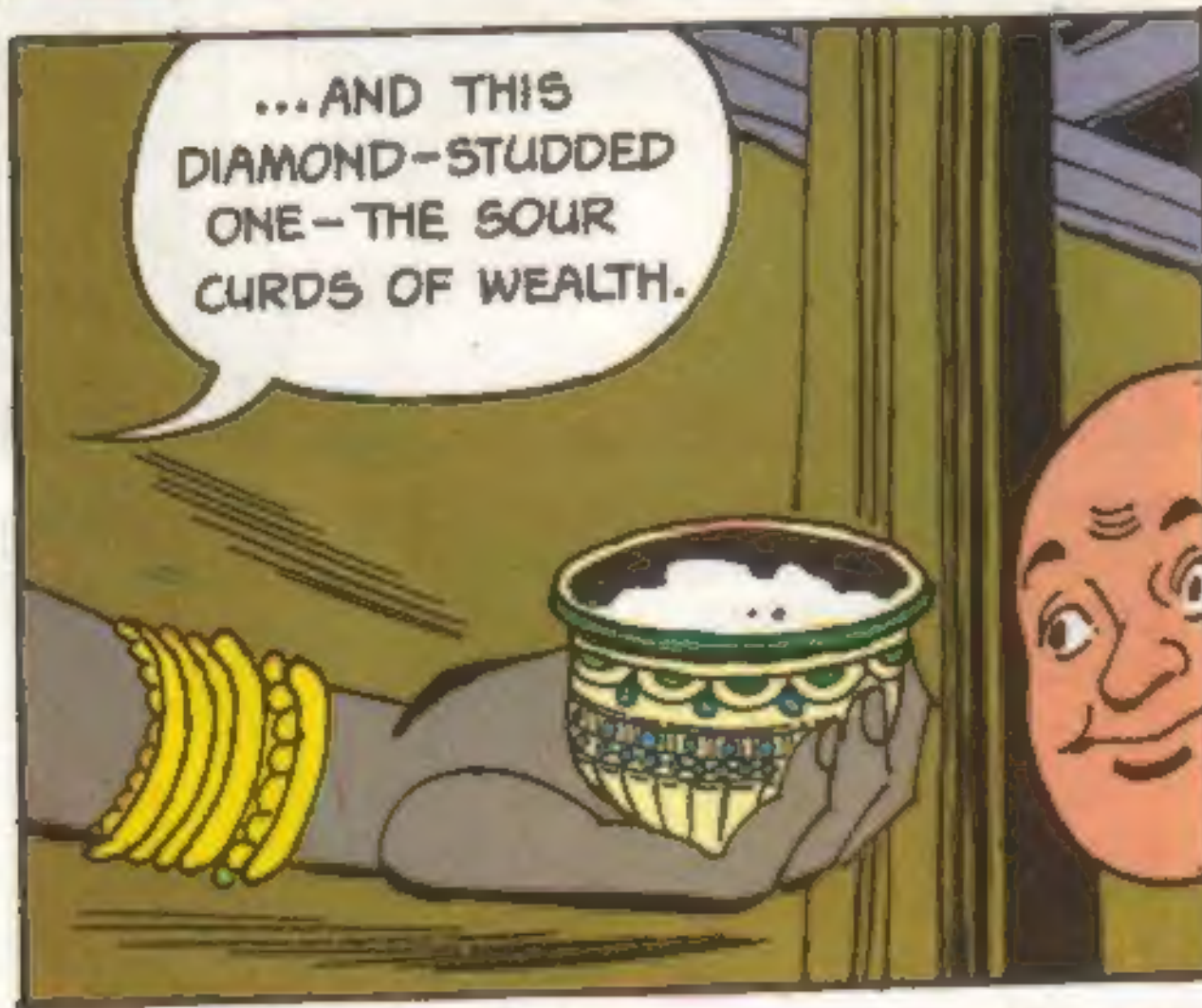
IT CERTAINLY WOULD BE  
FUNNY IF MY TWO HANDS WERE  
TO BATTLE IN VAIN WITH MY  
THOUSAND NOSES!













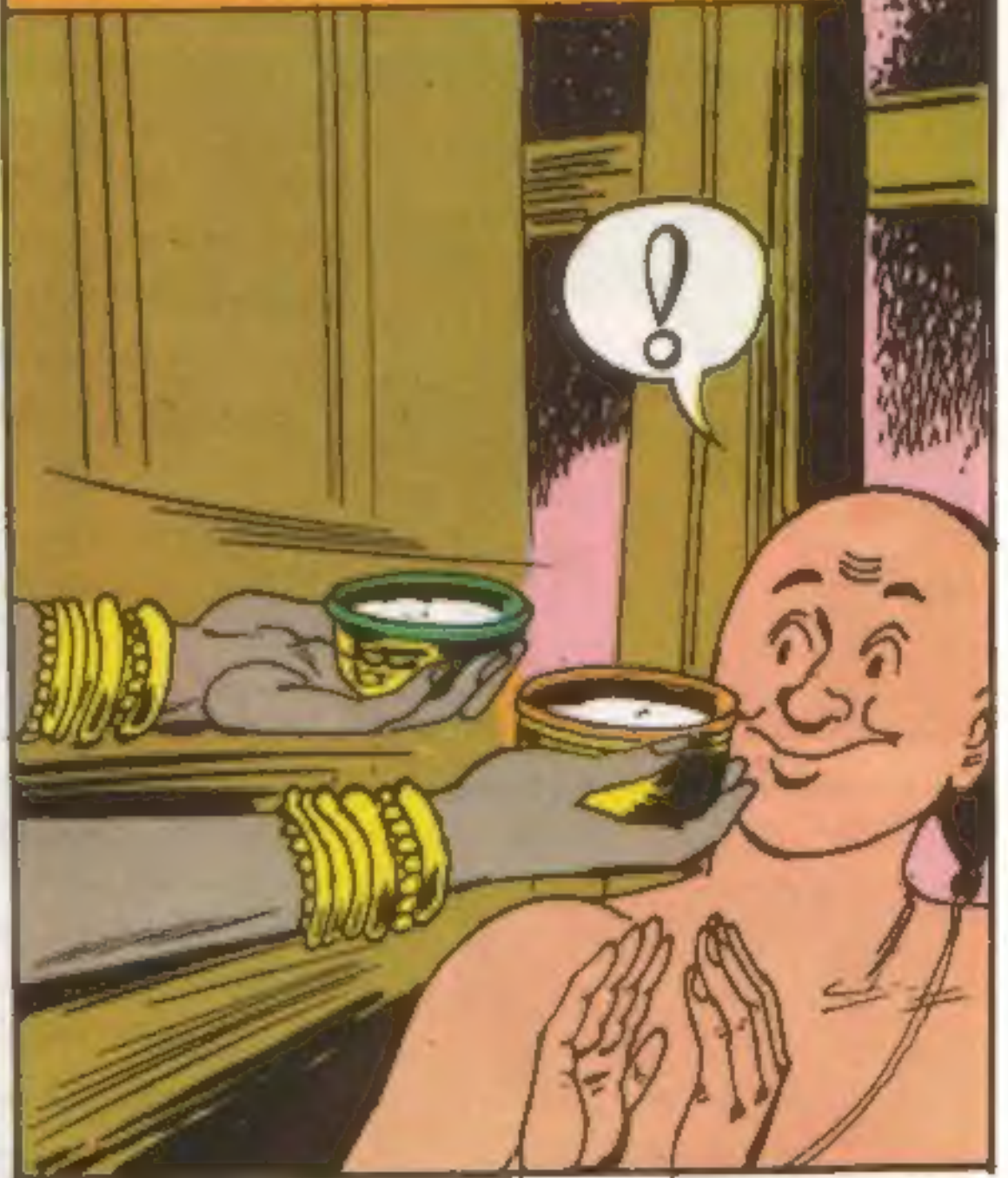
RAMAN WAS QUIET FOR A MOMENT. THEN —

O GODDESS, HOW CAN I CHOOSE WITHOUT FIRST TASTING BOTH?

THAT'S TRUE.



WITHOUT THINKING, THE GODDESS HELD OUT THE CUPS.



BEFORE SHE KNEW WHAT WAS HAPPENING, RAMAN GULPED DOWN THE CONTENTS OF BOTH CUPS.



TOO LATE, THE GODDESS REALISED SHE HAD BEEN TRICKED. SHE WAS FURIOUS. BUT RAMAN BOWED HUMBLY BEFORE HER.

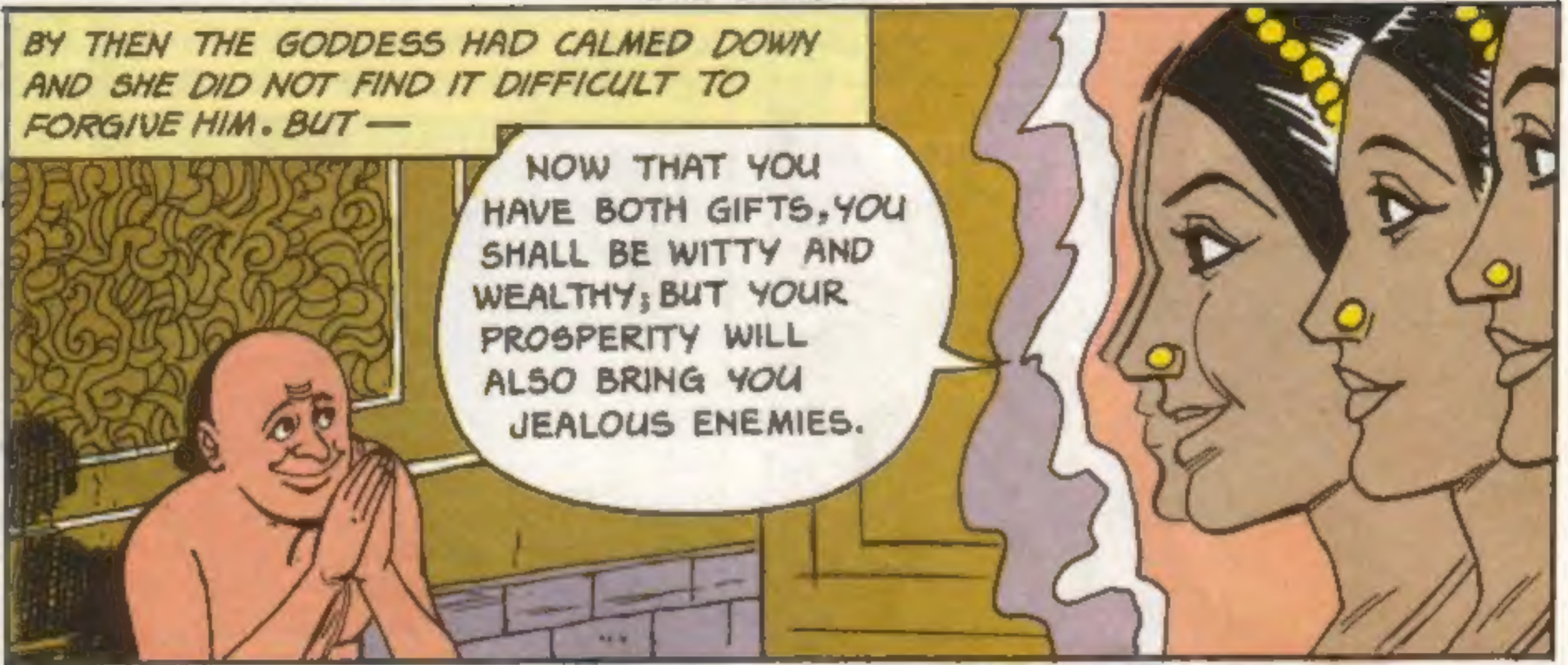
O GODDESS, FORGIVE ME. AS YOU KNOW, THE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER WOULD BE USELESS TO ME. I HAD TO HAVE BOTH.





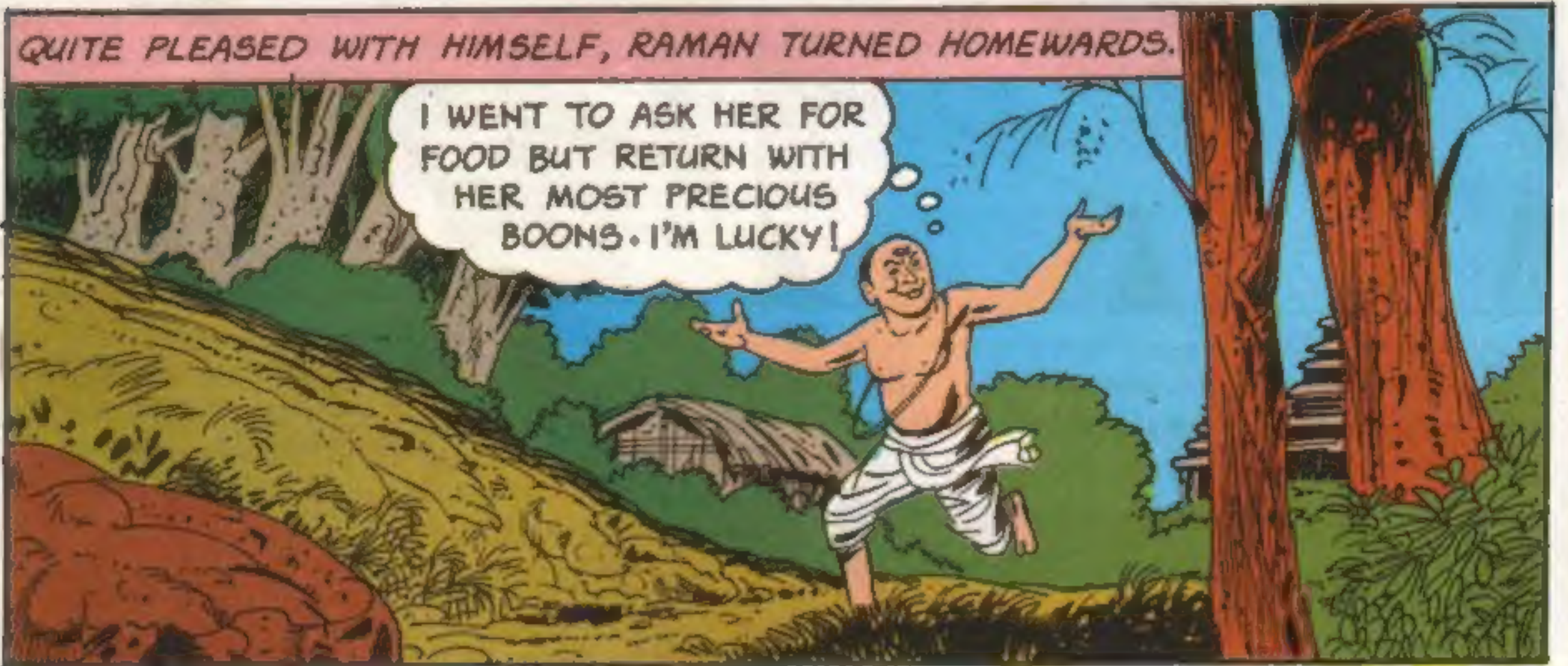
BY THEN THE GODDESS HAD CALMED DOWN AND SHE DID NOT FIND IT DIFFICULT TO FORGIVE HIM. BUT —

NOW THAT YOU HAVE BOTH GIFTS, YOU SHALL BE WITTY AND WEALTHY; BUT YOUR PROSPERITY WILL ALSO BRING YOU JEALOUS ENEMIES.



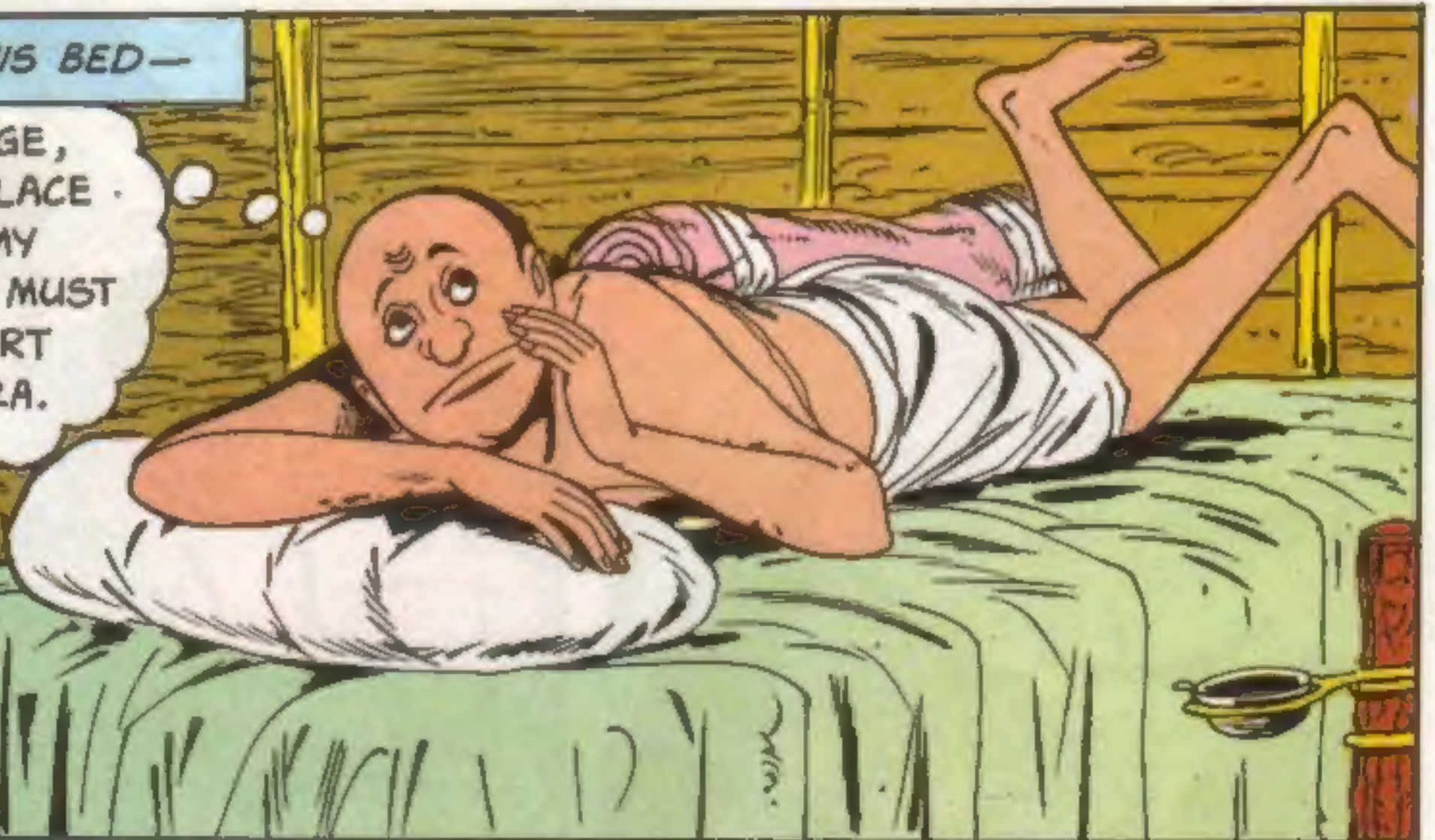
QUITE PLEASED WITH HIMSELF, RAMAN TURNED HOMEWARDS.

I WENT TO ASK HER FOR FOOD BUT RETURN WITH HER MOST PRECIOUS BOONS. I'M LUCKY!



AS HE LAY ON HIS BED —

THIS TINY VILLAGE, TENALI, IS NO PLACE FOR A MAN OF MY ATTAINMENTS. I MUST ENTER THE COURT OF VIJAYANAGARA.



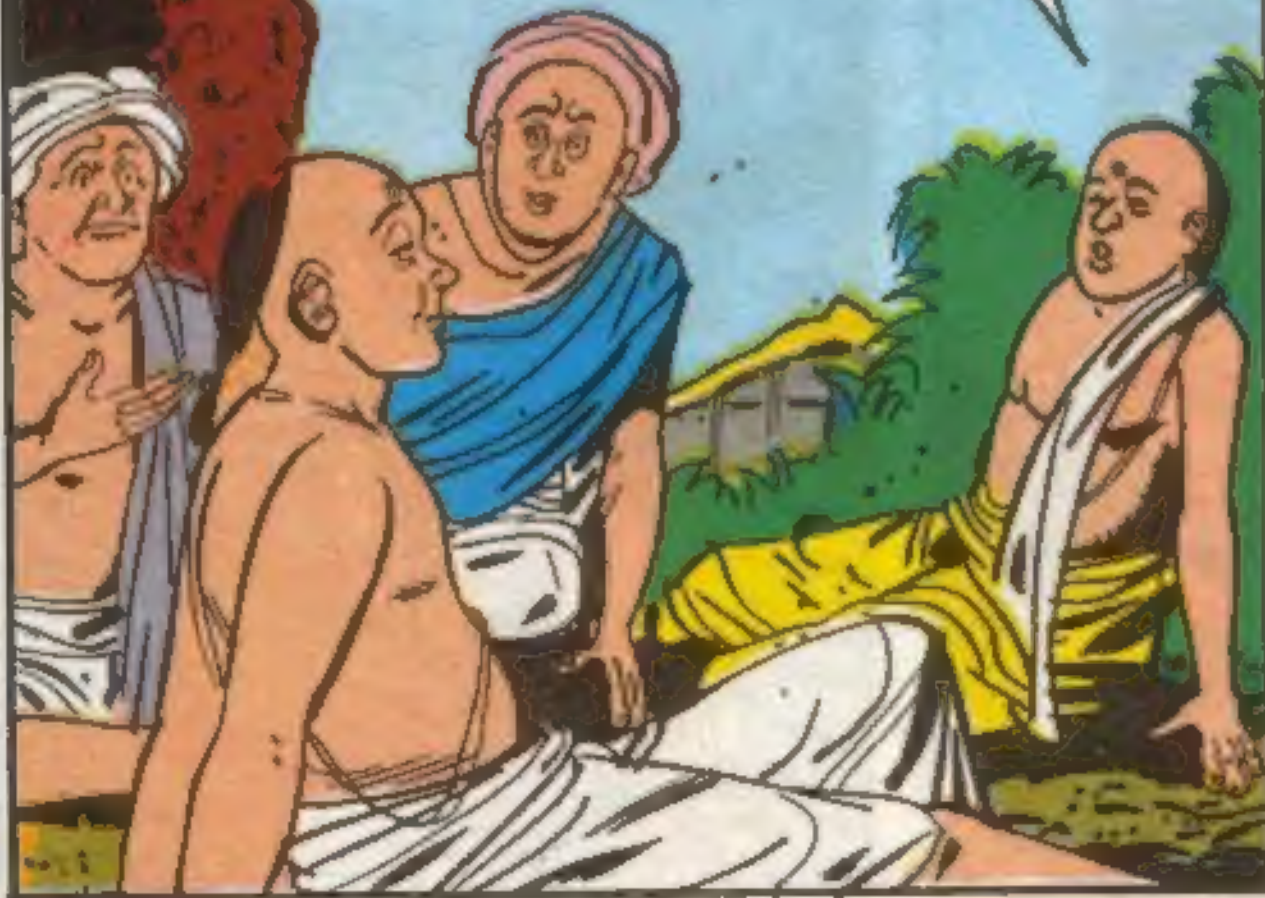


THE NEXT DAY WHEN HE SPOKE OF IT TO HIS FRIENDS —

ARE YOU MAD, RAMAN?

THE PALACE IS NO PLACE FOR RUSTICS.

THOSE HEFTY GUARDS AT THE GATES WILL THROW YOU OUT.



RAMAN KNEW WHAT THEY HAD SAID WAS TRUE BUT HE WAS NOT DETERRED.



RAMAN SPENT HIS DAYS WONDERING HOW TO GET A PATRON. THEN SUDDENLY, ONE DAY —

WHAT'S ALL THE COMMOTION ABOUT?

DON'T YOU KNOW? THE RAJGURU\* HAS COME FROM VIJAYANAGARA TO WORSHIP AT THE SHRINE OF MANGALAGIRI.



RAMAN WAS OVERJOYED.

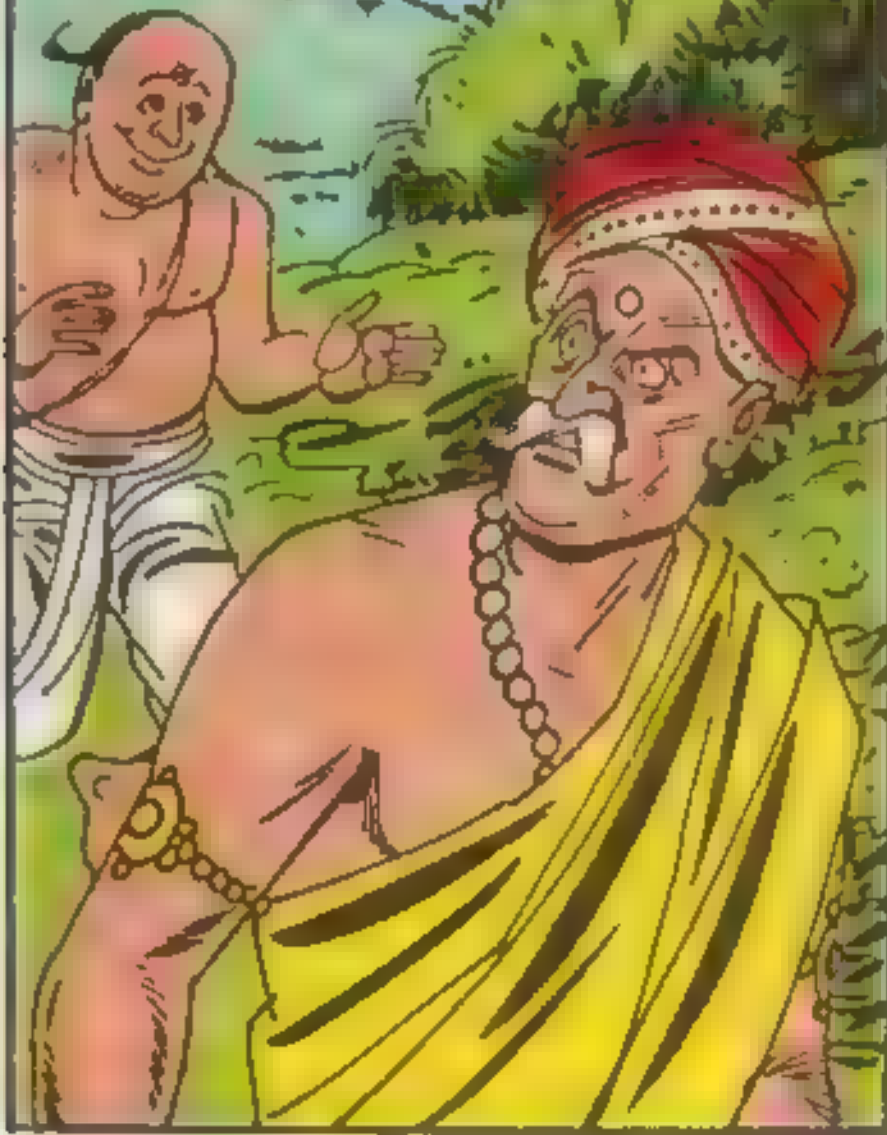




RAMAN FOLLOWED THE RAJ-GURU TO THE SHRINE.

SIR, MAY I HAVE THE PRIVILEGE OF SERVING YOU ?

AND WHO, MAY I ASK, ARE YOU ?



WHEN RAMAN TOLD HIM —

WHY NOT MAKE USE OF THE IGNORANT VILLAGE BUMPKIN ?

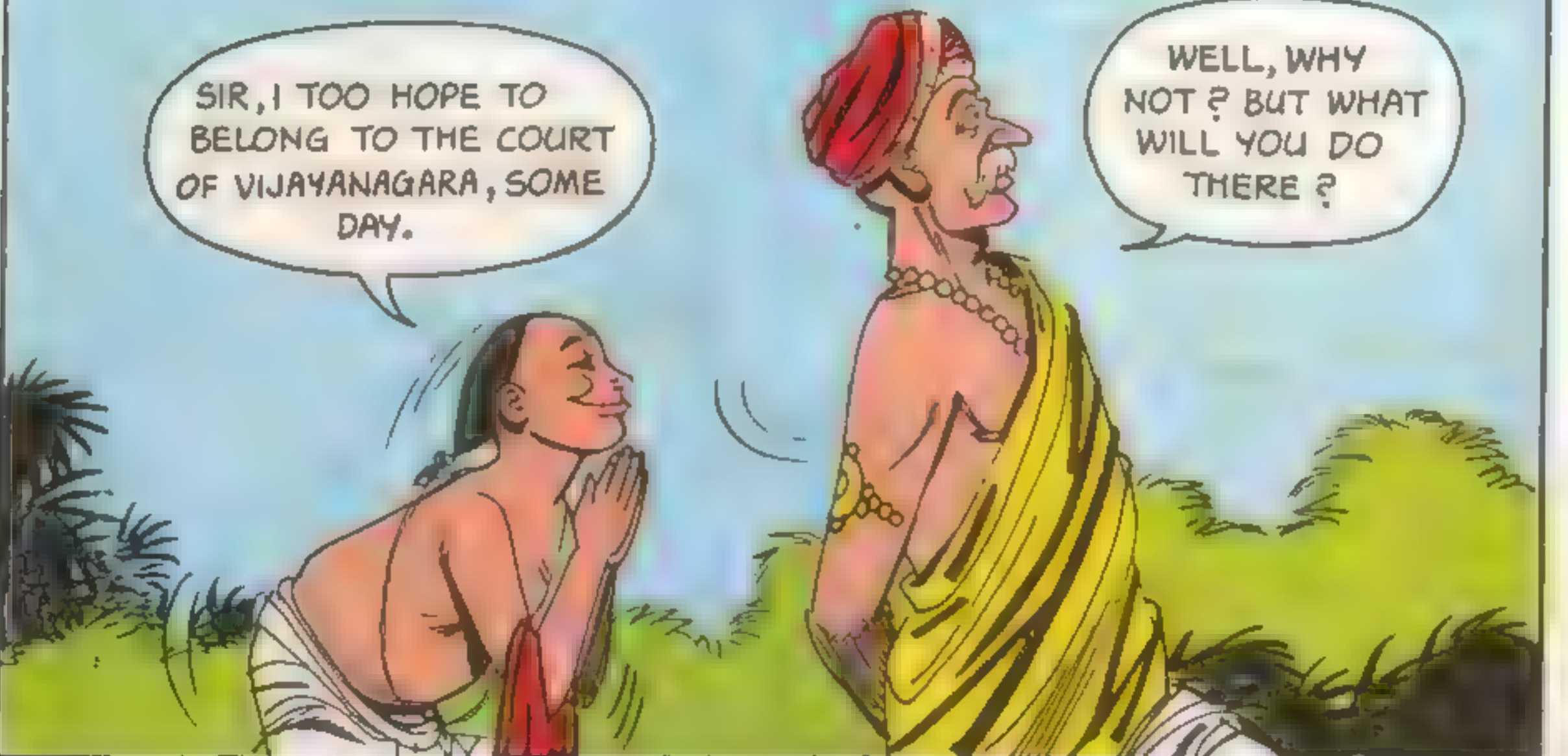


ALL RIGHT, I AM ON MY WAY TO THE RIVER TO BATHE. YOU MAY CARRY MY TOWEL FOR ME.

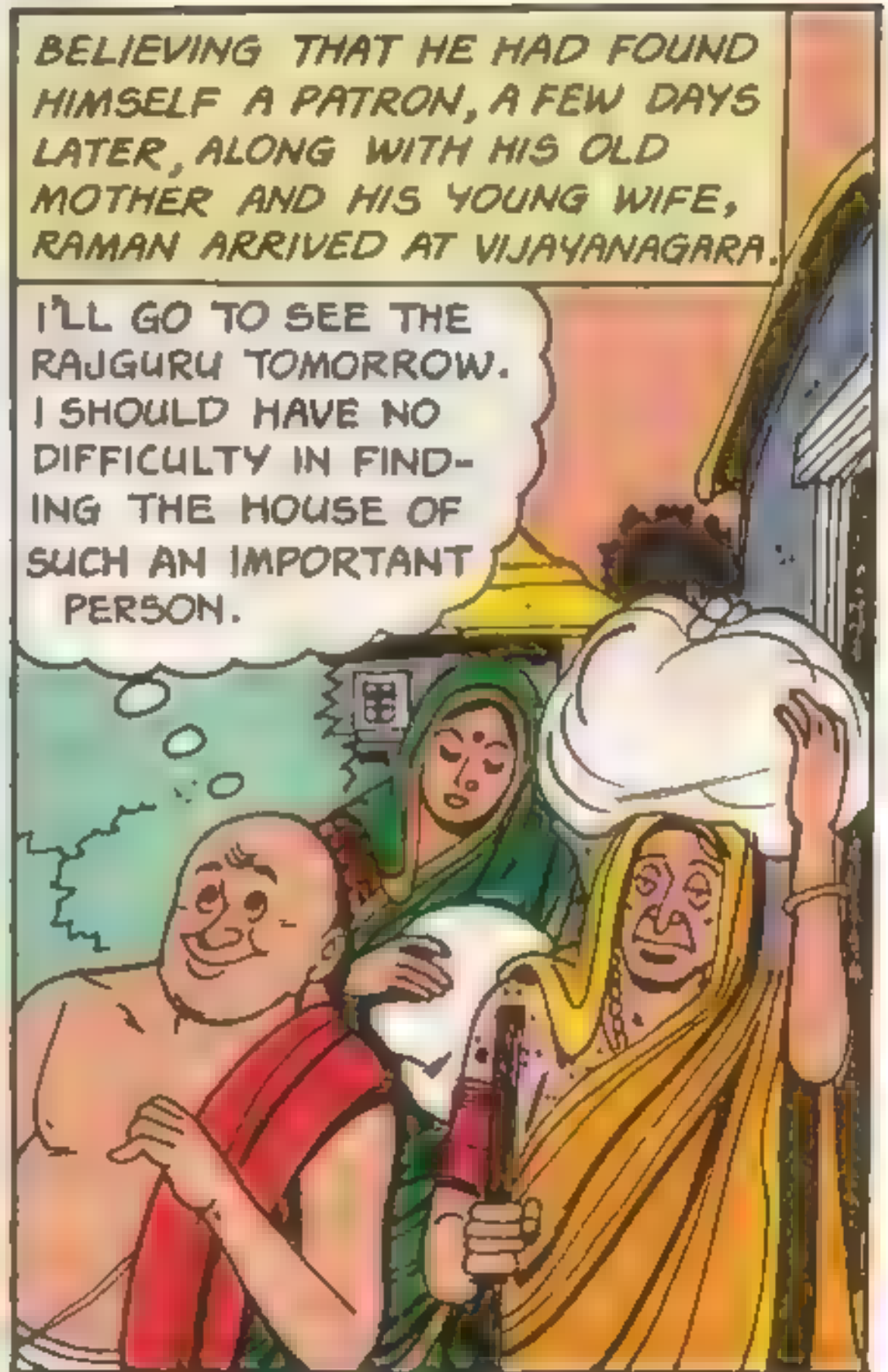


SIR, I TOO HOPE TO BELONG TO THE COURT OF VIJAYANAGARA, SOME DAY.

WELL, WHY NOT ? BUT WHAT WILL YOU DO THERE ?









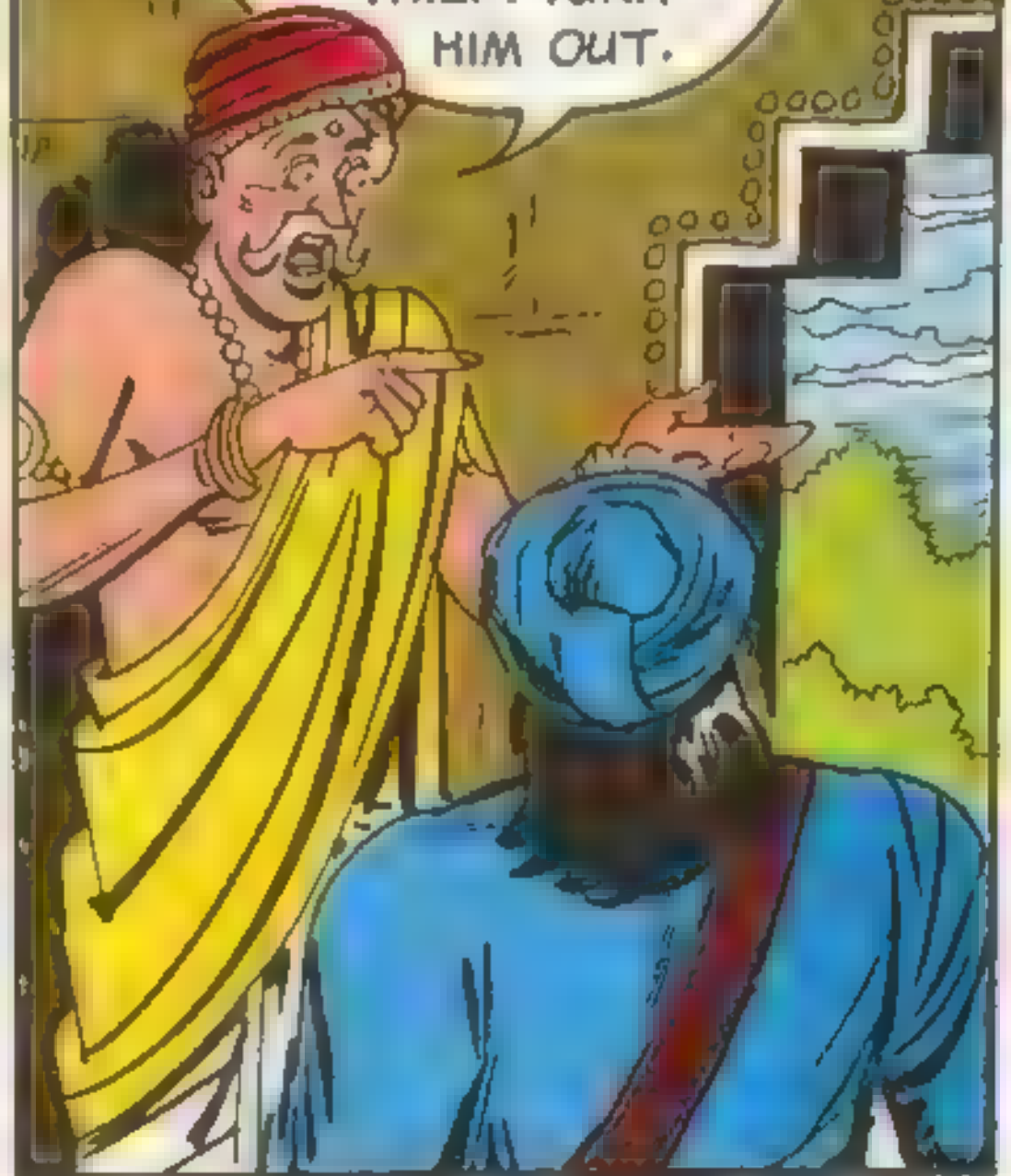
MEANWHILE, THE RAJGURU HAD SEEN RAMAN FROM ONE OF HIS WINDOWS.

WHY! THE FOOL HAS INDEED COME!



HE SENT FOR ONE OF HIS ATTENDANTS.

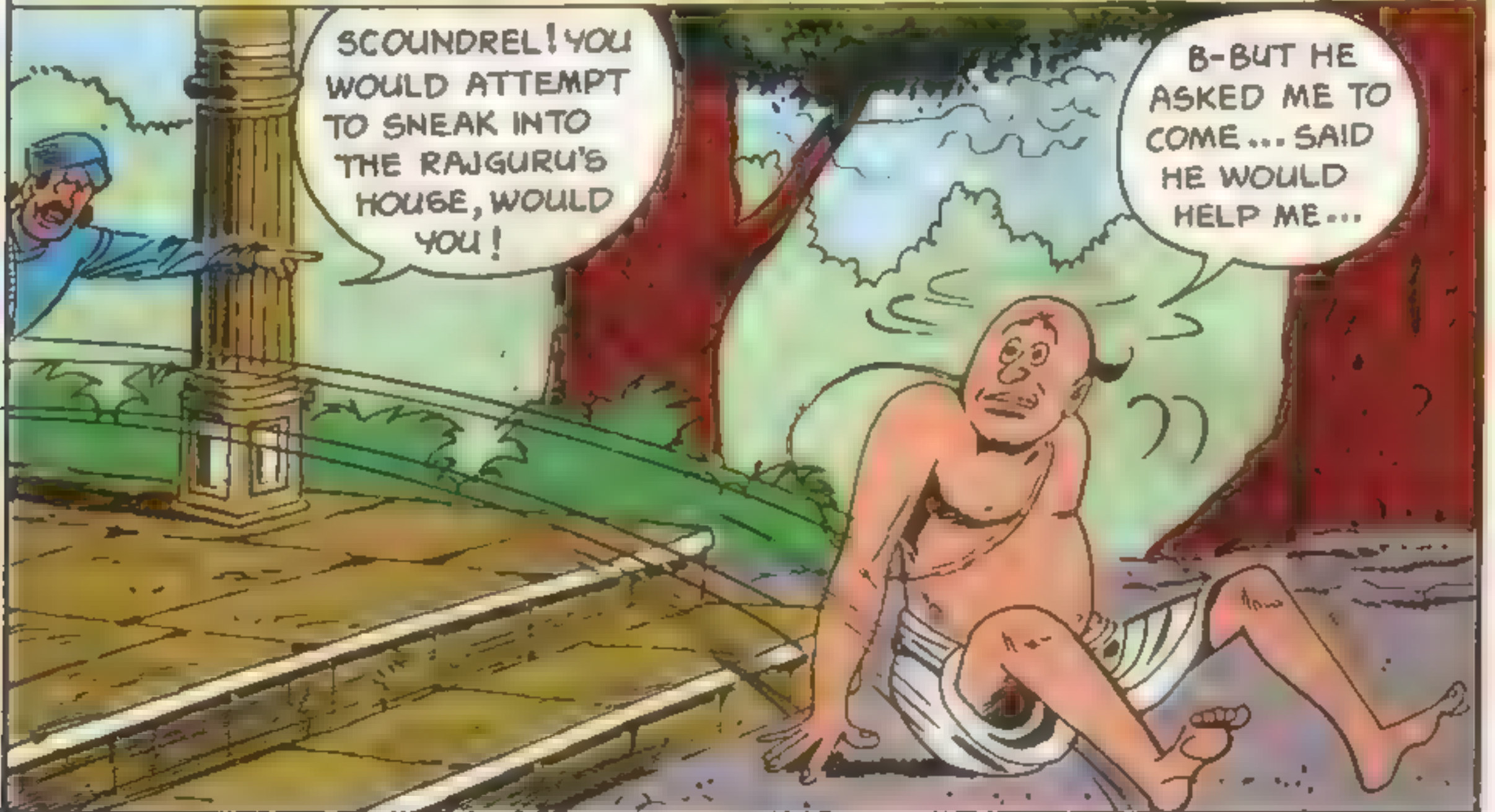
THERE IS A MAN LURKING IN THE COURTYARD. HE SEEMS TO BE A THIEF. TURN HIM OUT.



BEFORE RAMAN KNEW WHAT WAS HAPPENING, HE WAS OUT ON THE STREET.

SCOUNDREL! YOU WOULD ATTEMPT TO SNEAK INTO THE RAJGURU'S HOUSE, WOULD YOU!

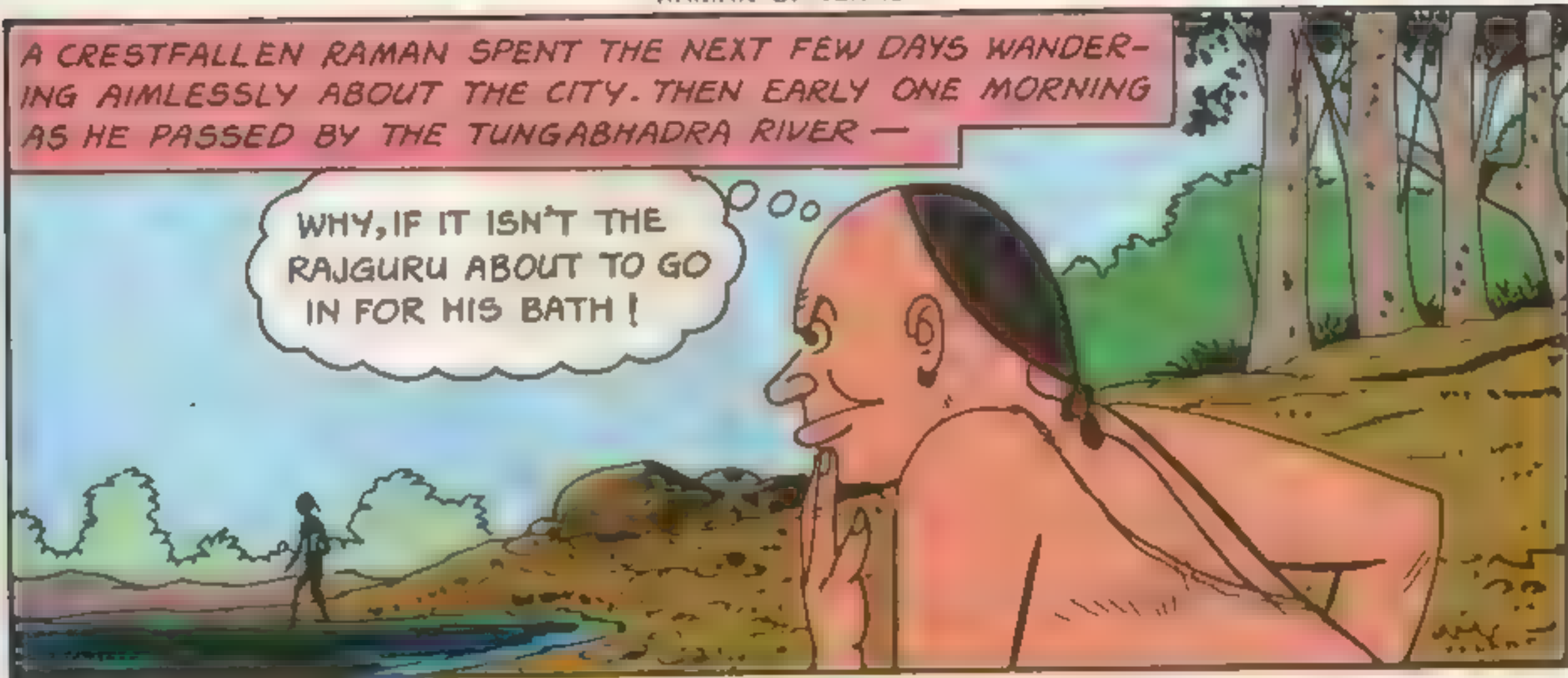
B-BUT HE ASKED ME TO COME... SAID HE WOULD HELP ME...





A CRESTFALLEN RAMAN SPENT THE NEXT FEW DAYS WANDERING AIMLESSLY ABOUT THE CITY. THEN EARLY ONE MORNING AS HE PASSED BY THE TUNGABHADRA RIVER —

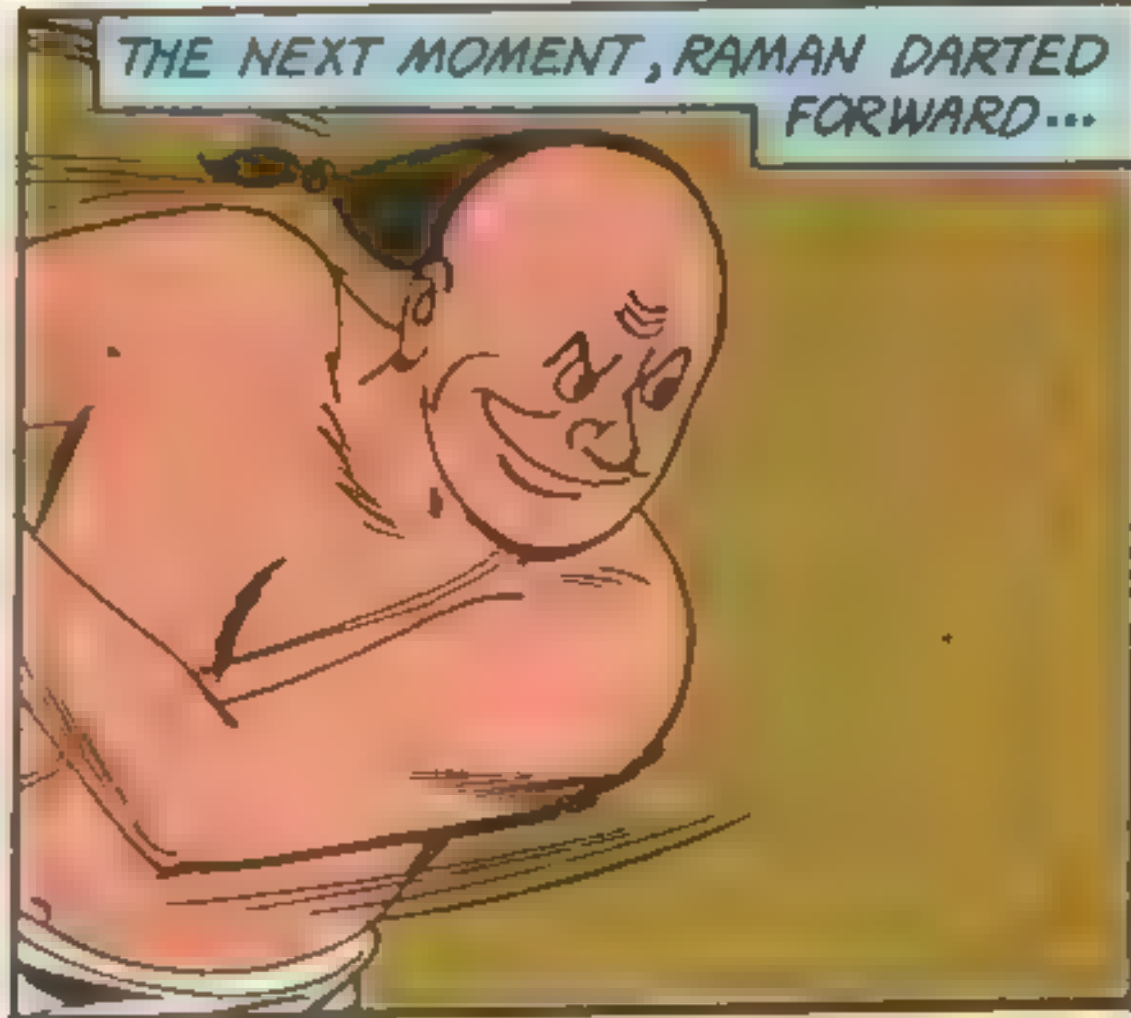
WHY, IF IT ISN'T THE RAJGURU ABOUT TO GO IN FOR HIS BATH!



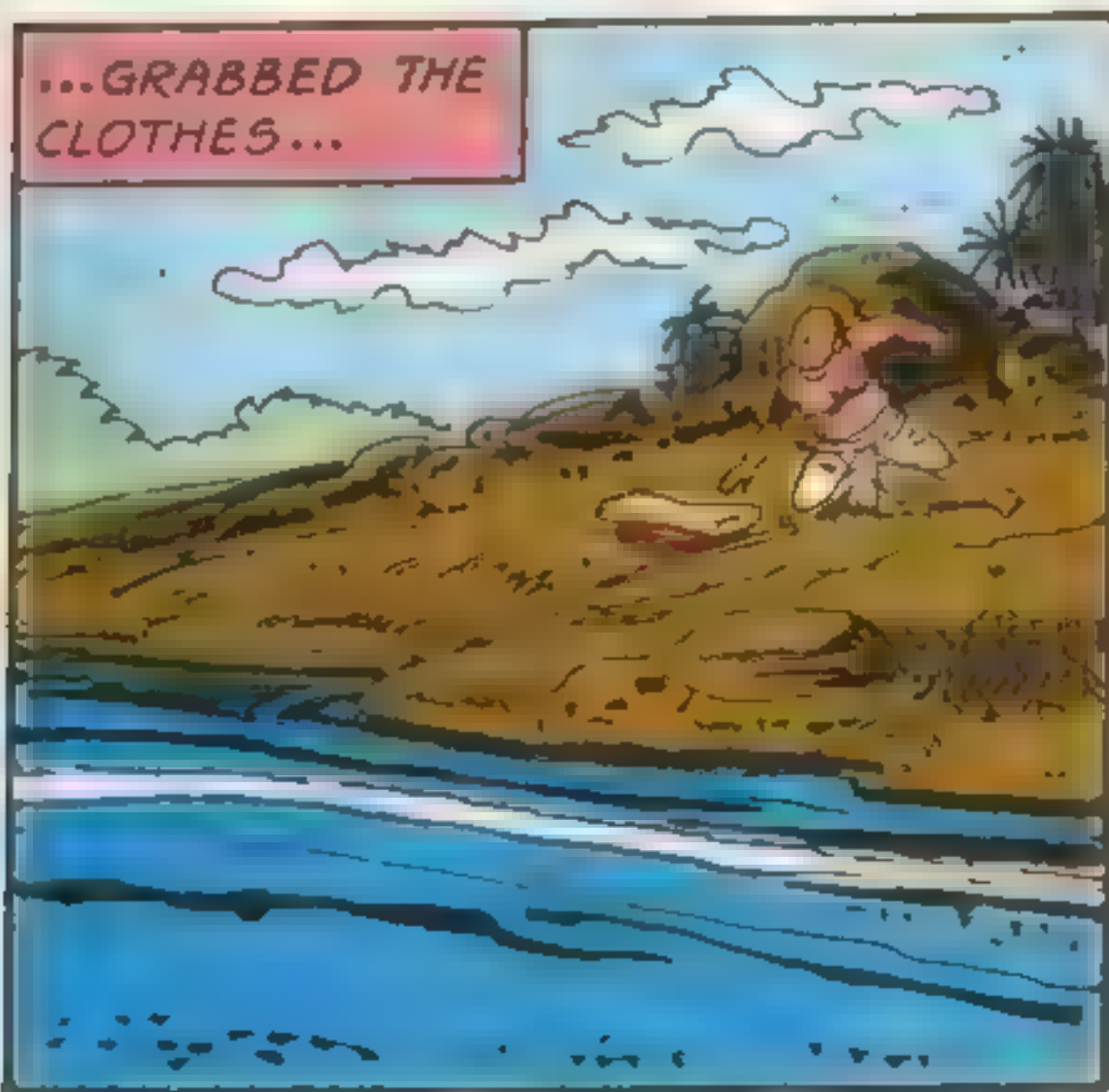
HE'S LEFT HIS CLOTHES ON THE BANK!



THE NEXT MOMENT, RAMAN DARTED FORWARD...

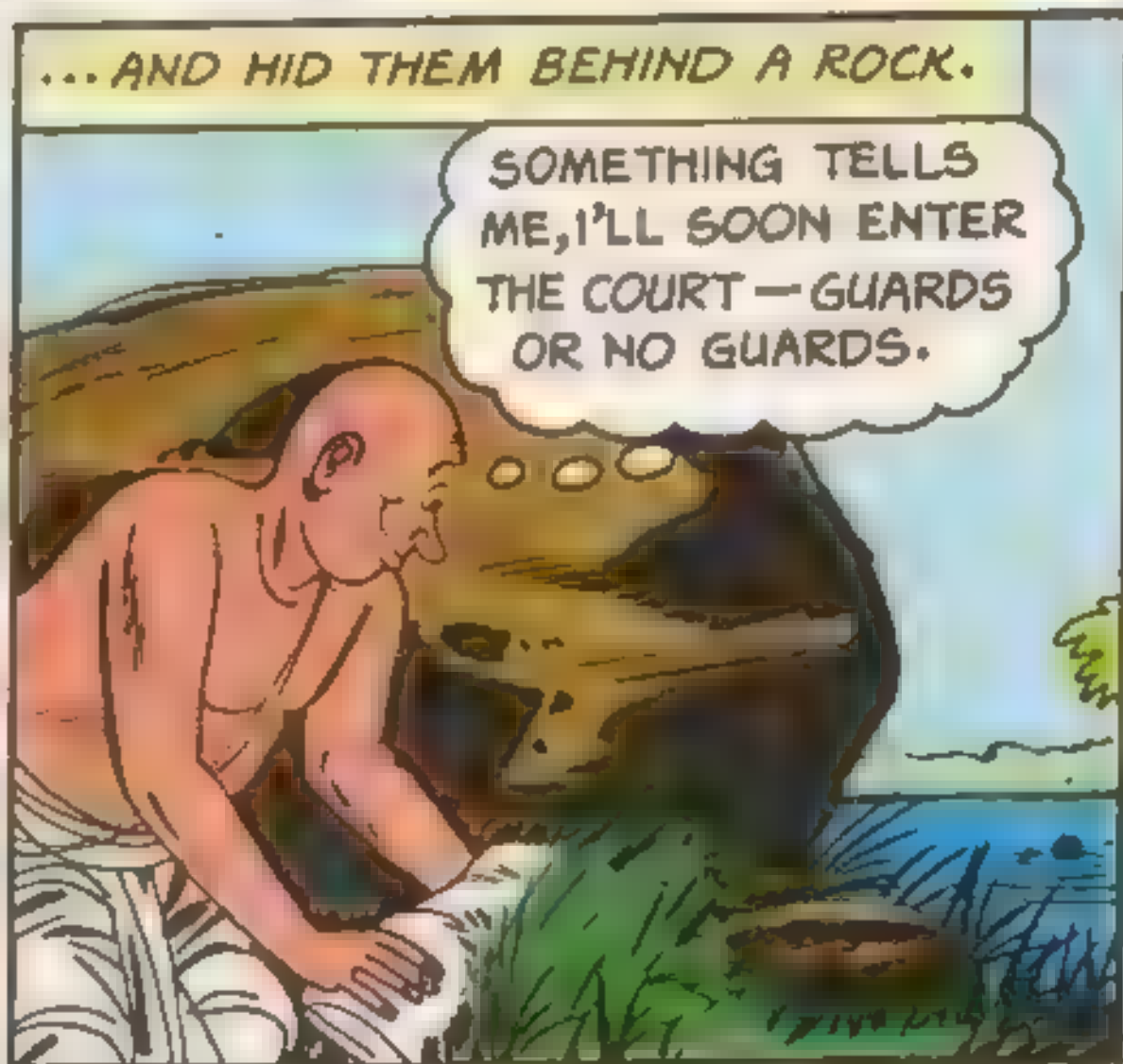


...GRABBED THE CLOTHES...



...AND HID THEM BEHIND A ROCK.

SOMETHING TELLS ME, I'LL SOON ENTER THE COURT — GUARDS OR NO GUARDS.





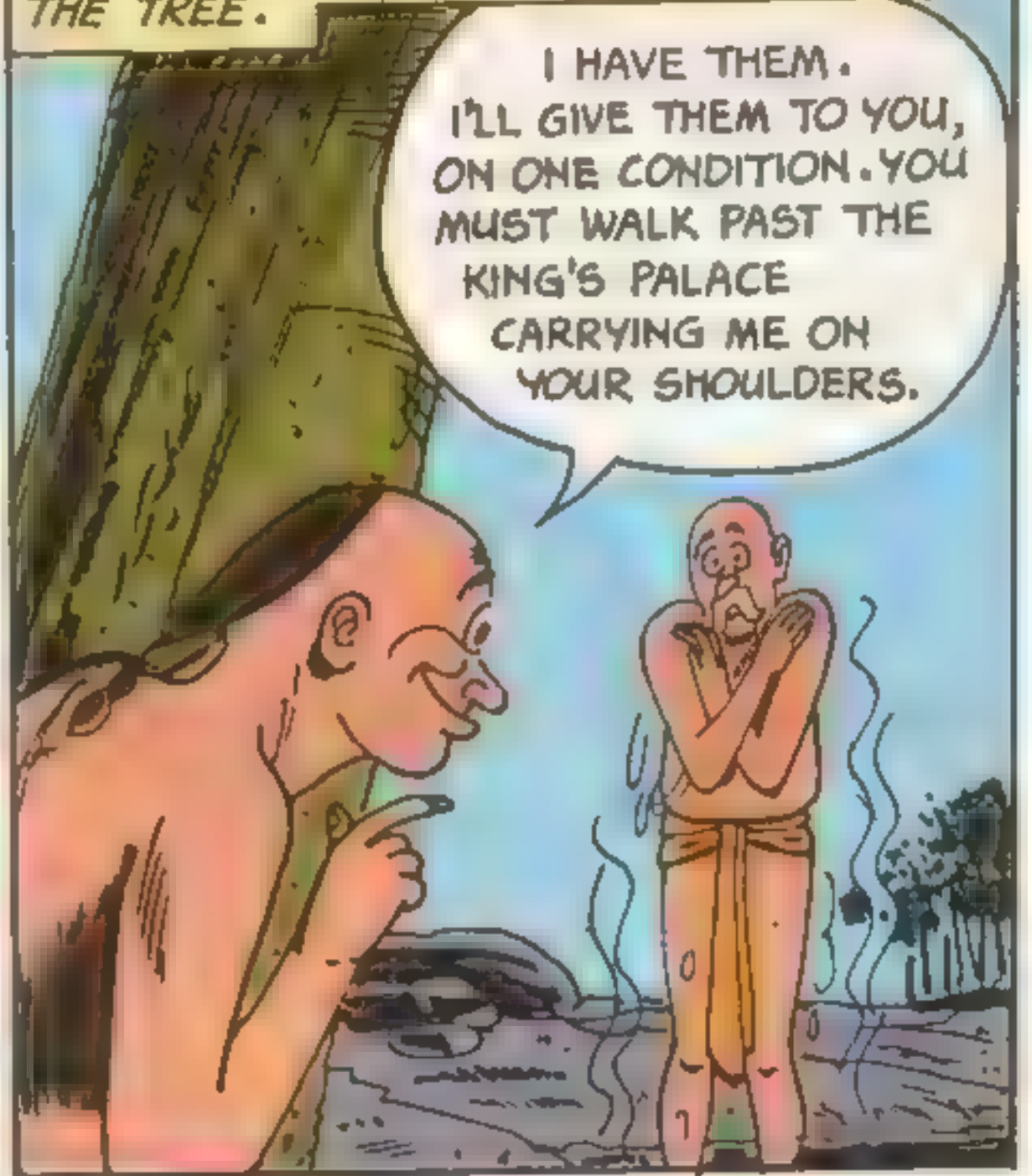
HIS BATH OVER, THE RAJGURU TURNED AND REACHED OUT FOR HIS CLOTHES.

WH-WHERE ARE MY CLOTHES? I'D LEFT THEM RIGHT HERE. WHERE COULD THEY HAVE DISAPPEARED?



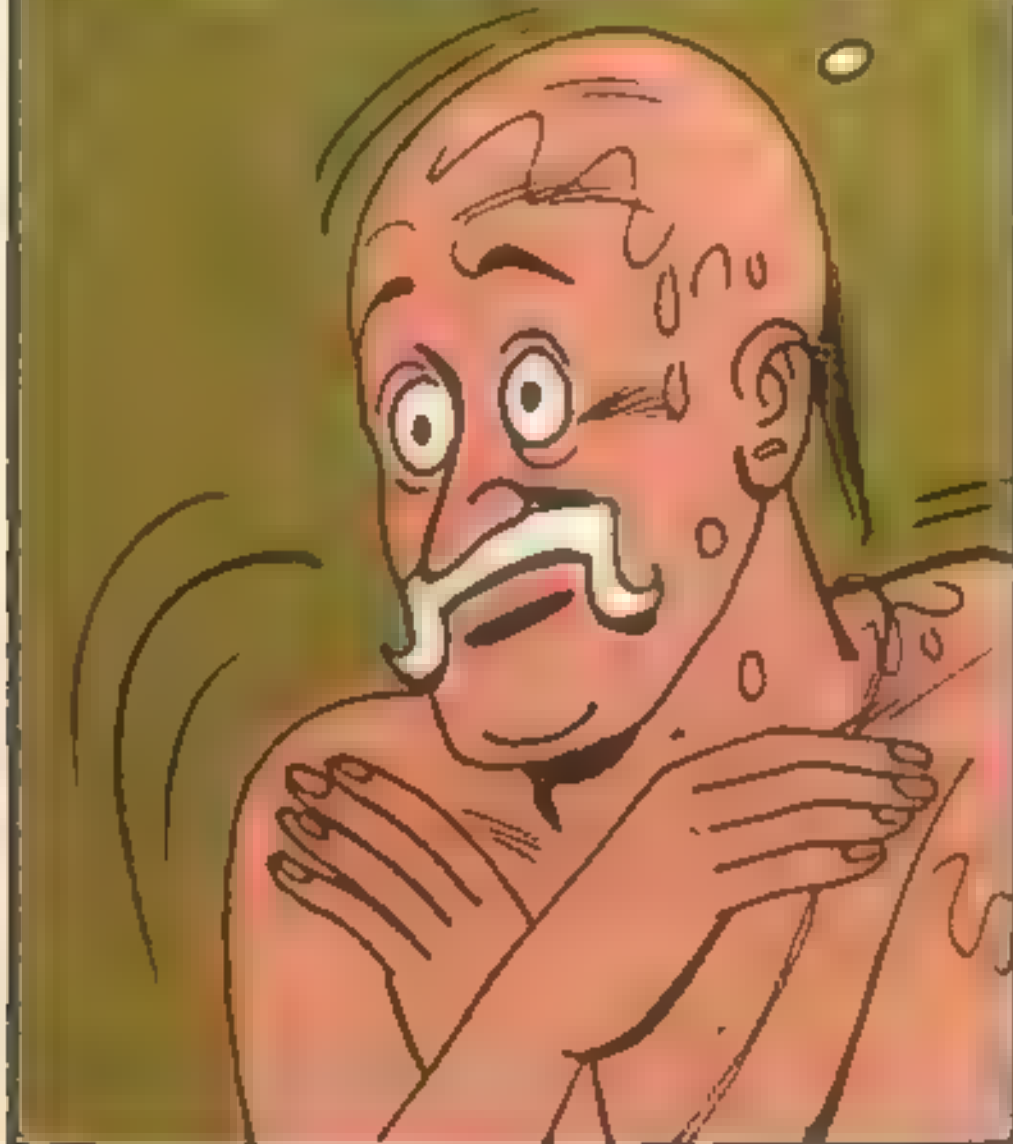
RAMAN STEPPED OUT FROM BEHIND THE TREE.

I HAVE THEM. I'LL GIVE THEM TO YOU, ON ONE CONDITION. YOU MUST WALK PAST THE KING'S PALACE CARRYING ME ON YOUR SHOULDERS.

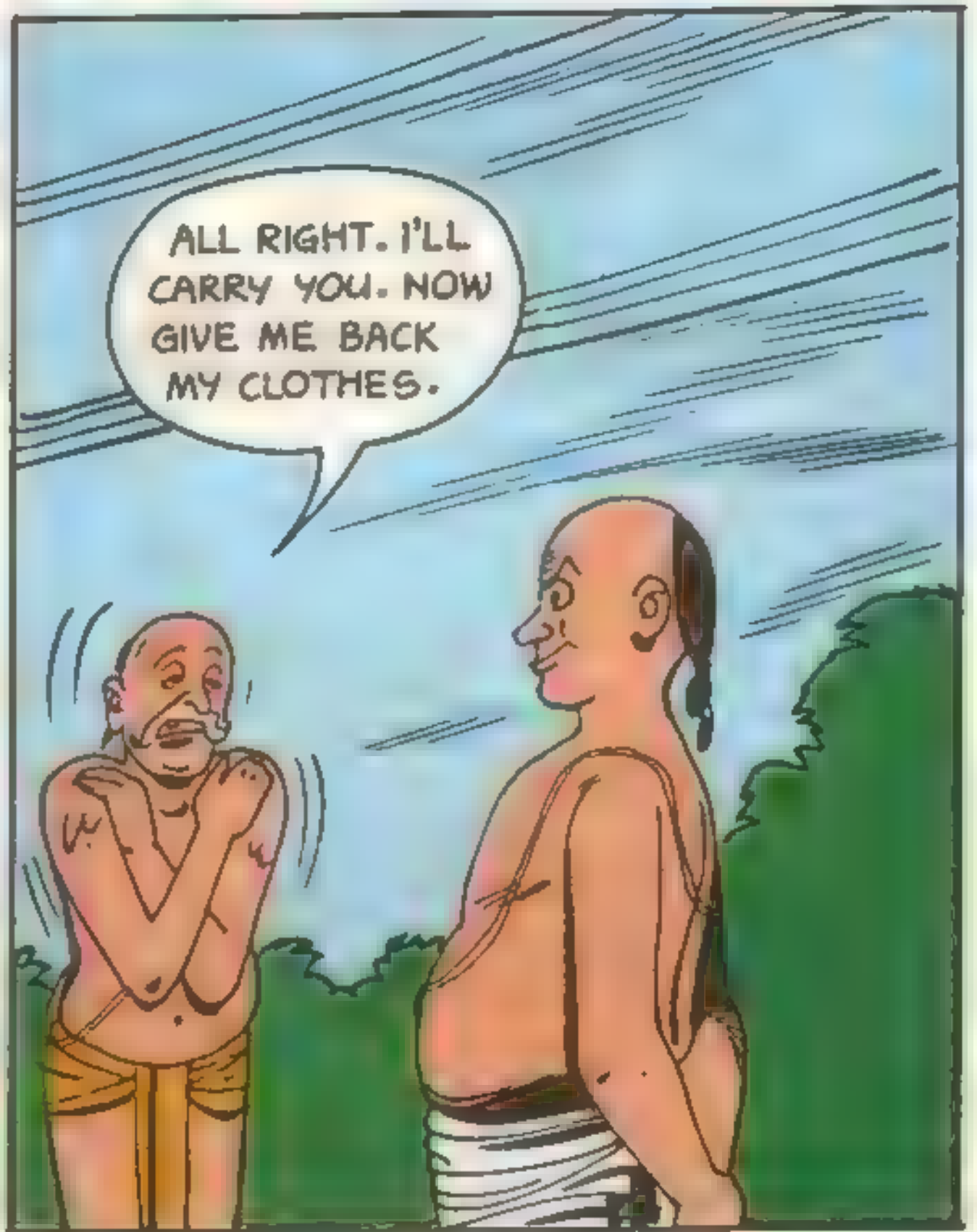


THE RAJGURU HAD TO AGREE.

THE FELLOW MUST BE MAD! BUT I'LL HAVE TO HUMOUR HIM OR CATCH MY DEATH IN THIS ICY WATER.



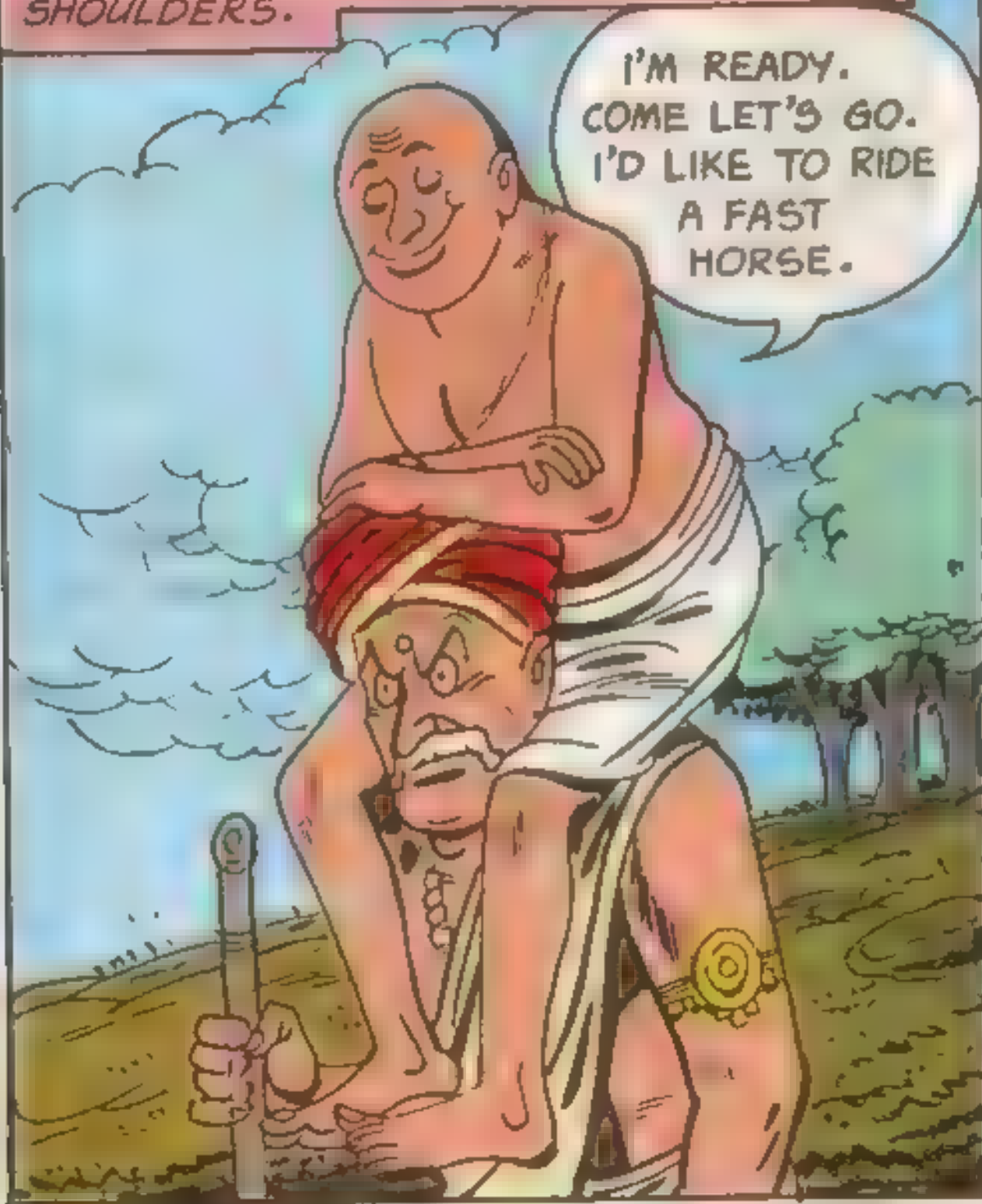
ALL RIGHT. I'LL CARRY YOU. NOW GIVE ME BACK MY CLOTHES.





AS SOON AS THE PRIEST WAS DRESSED, RAMAN HOISTED HIMSELF ONTO HIS SHOULDERS.

I'M READY.  
COME LET'S GO.  
I'D LIKE TO RIDE  
A FAST  
HORSE.

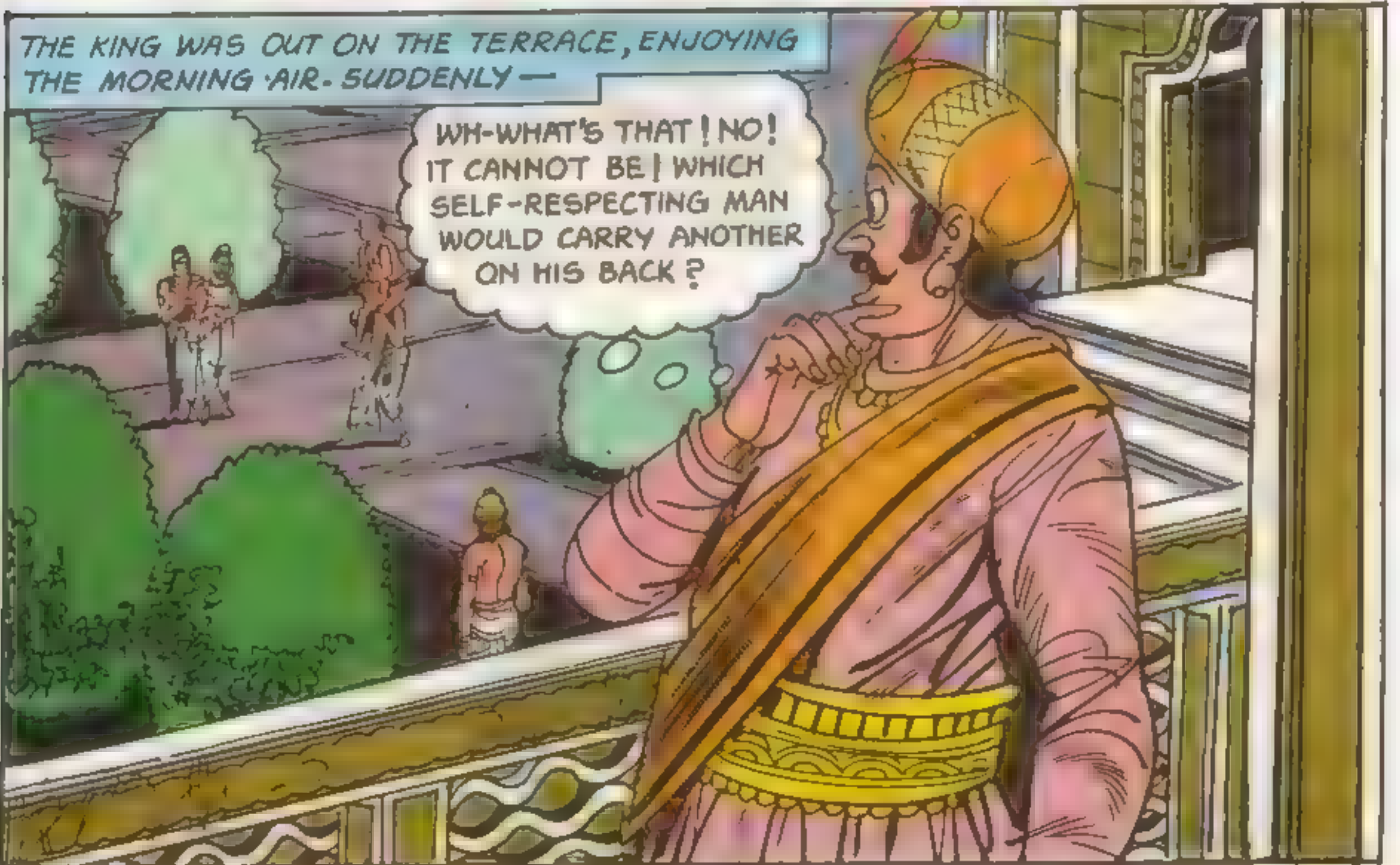


THE PRIEST BEGAN WALKING AND THEY SOON APPROACHED THE PALACE.



THE KING WAS OUT ON THE TERRACE, ENJOYING THE MORNING AIR. SUDDENLY —

WH-WHAT'S THAT! NO!  
IT CANNOT BE! WHICH  
SELF-RESPECTING MAN  
WOULD CARRY ANOTHER  
ON HIS BACK?



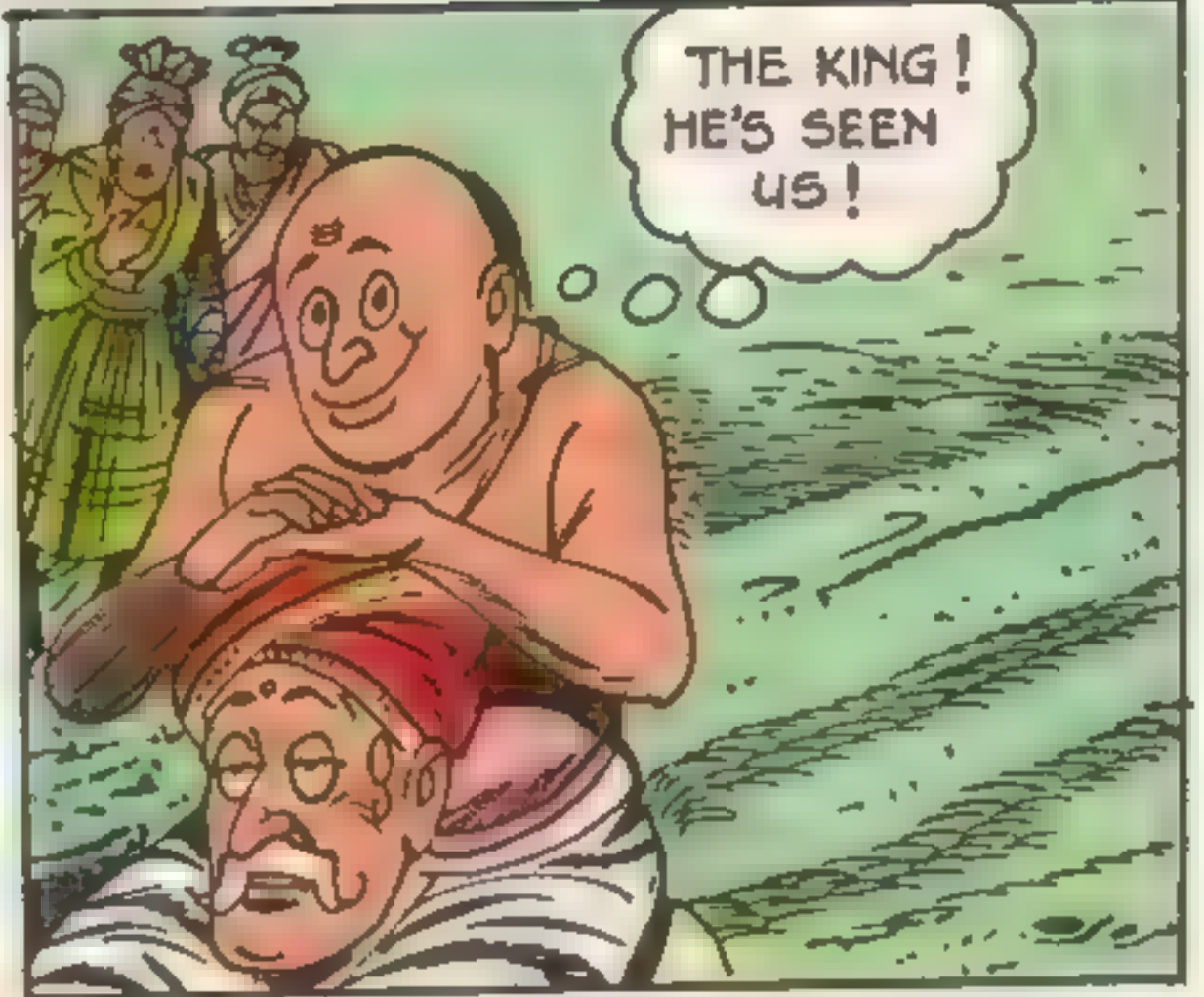


CURIOUS, THE KING STARED AT THE FIGURES, WAITING FOR THEM TO COME NEARER.

IT'S MY GURU!  
SURELY THERE'S  
SOME MISCHIEF  
AFOOT!



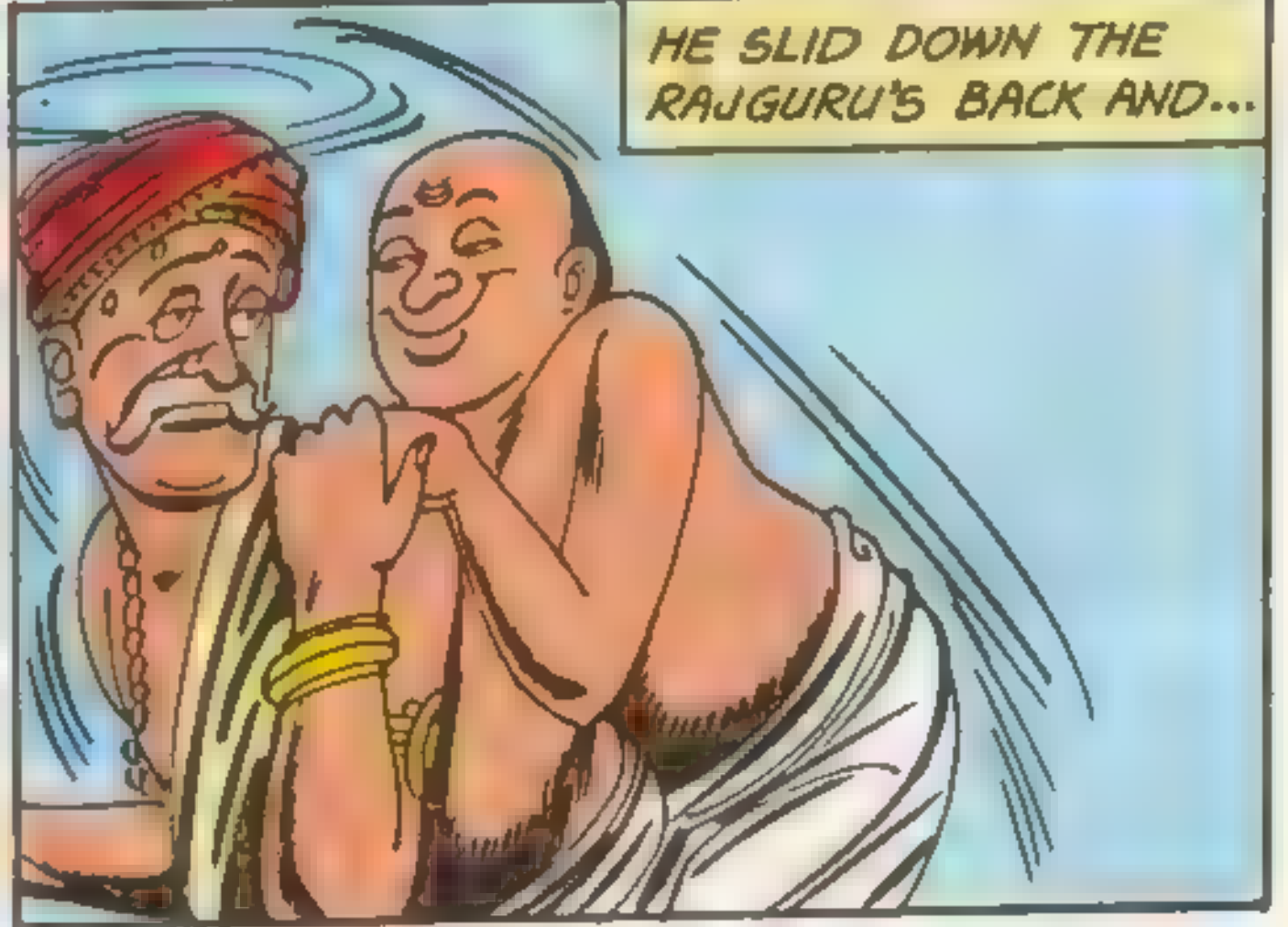
THE KING!  
HE'S SEEN  
US!



HE'S BOUND TO  
SEND HIS GUARDS  
OUT. I MUST BE  
QUICK!

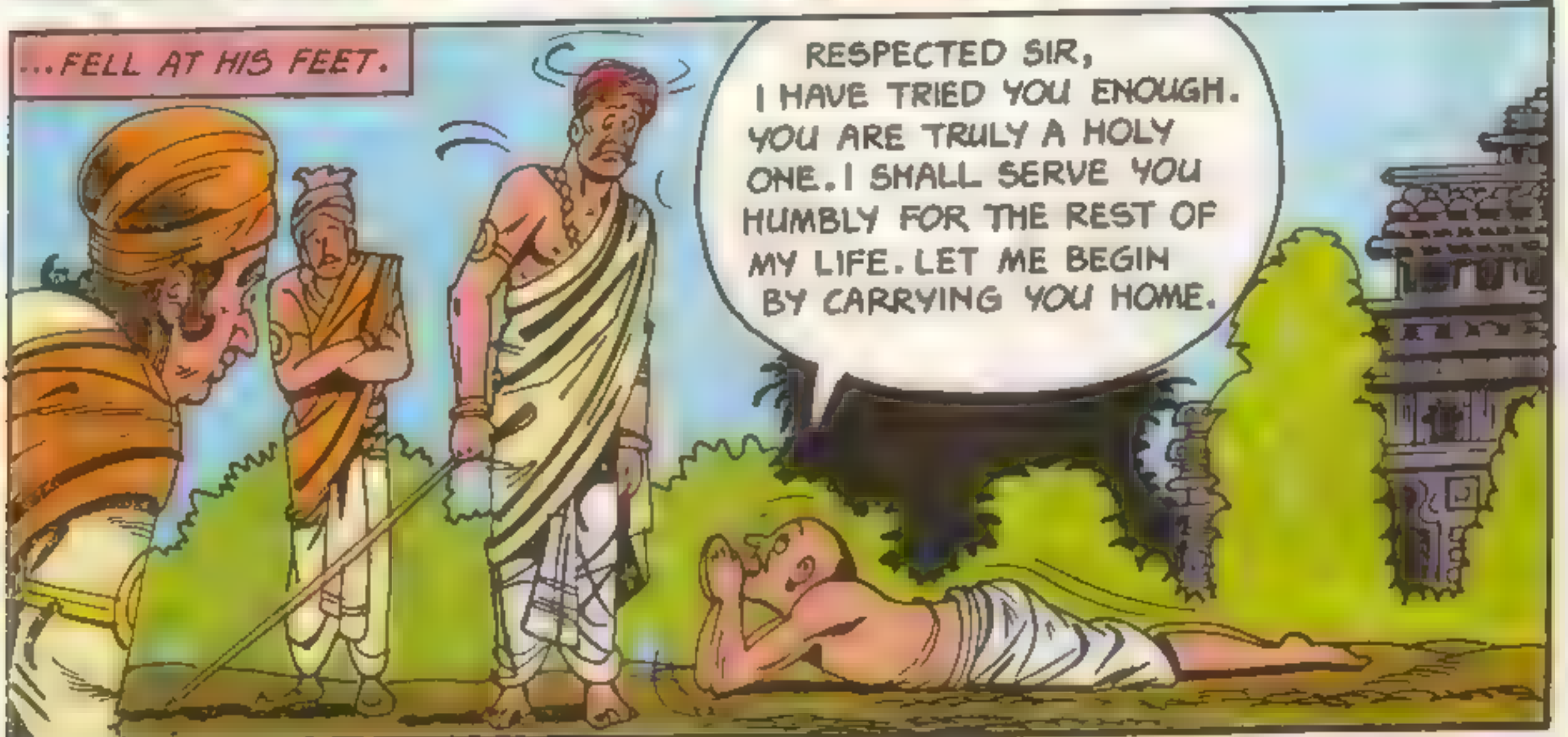


HE SLID DOWN THE  
RAJGURU'S BACK AND...



...FELL AT HIS FEET.

RESPECTED SIR,  
I HAVE TRIED YOU ENOUGH.  
YOU ARE TRULY A HOLY  
ONE. I SHALL SERVE YOU  
HUMBLY FOR THE REST OF  
MY LIFE. LET ME BEGIN  
BY CARRYING YOU HOME.





BEFORE THE RAJGURU COULD PROTEST,  
RAMAN HOISTED HIM ON HIS  
SHOULDERS...



...AND BEGAN WALKING.



MEANWHILE, THE KING HAD  
SUMMONED HIS GUARDS.

THERE IS A MAN  
RIDING ON MY EXALTED  
GURU'S SHOULDERS.  
I SMELL MISCHIEF. DRAG  
THE FELLOW DOWN,  
GIVE HIM A SOUND  
THRASHING AND  
LEAD THE GURU  
TO ME.



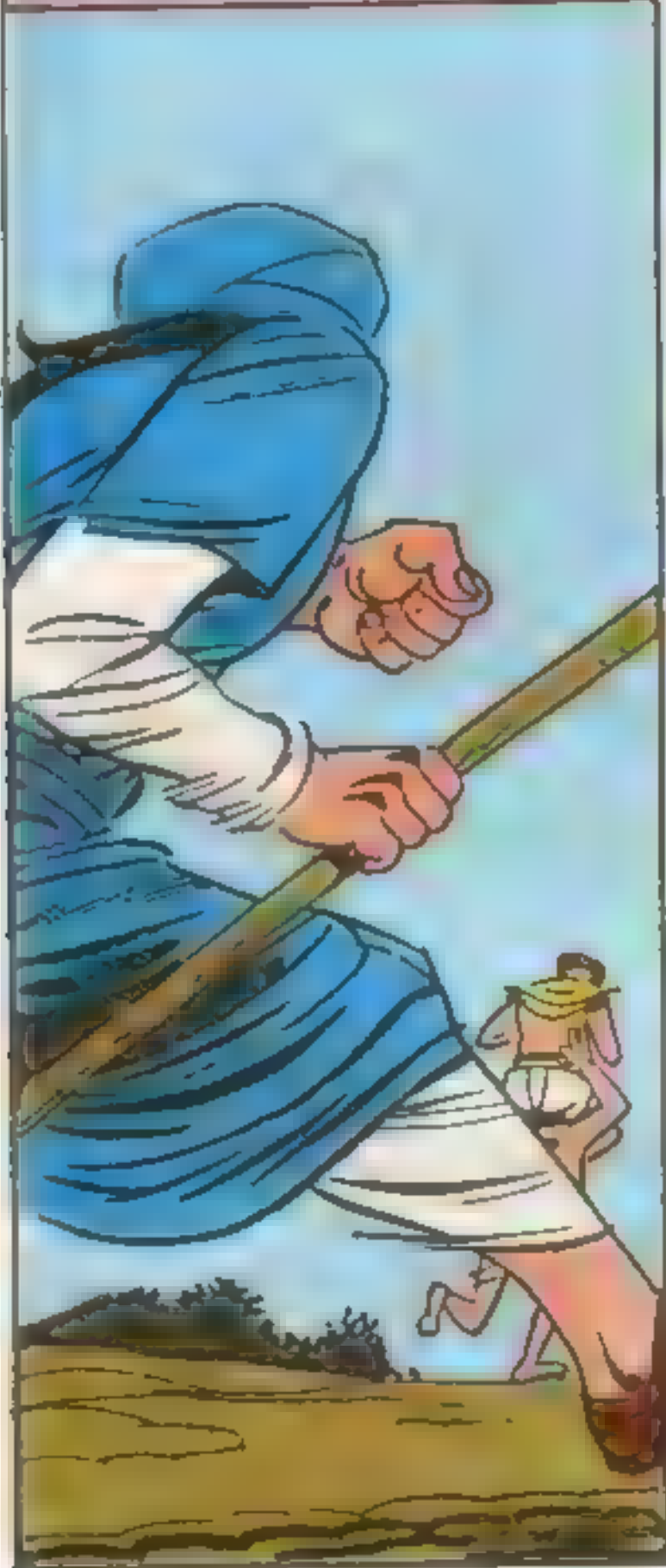
THE GUARDS HAD BEEN APPOINTED ONLY  
THE PREVIOUS EVENING AND THIS WAS  
THEIR FIRST ASSIGNMENT. THEY WERE  
EAGER TO MAKE IT A THOROUGH  
SUCCESS.

THERE  
THEY ARE!





THEY RUSHED FORWARD...



... DRAGGED THE  
RAJGURU OFF  
RAMAN'S BACK...

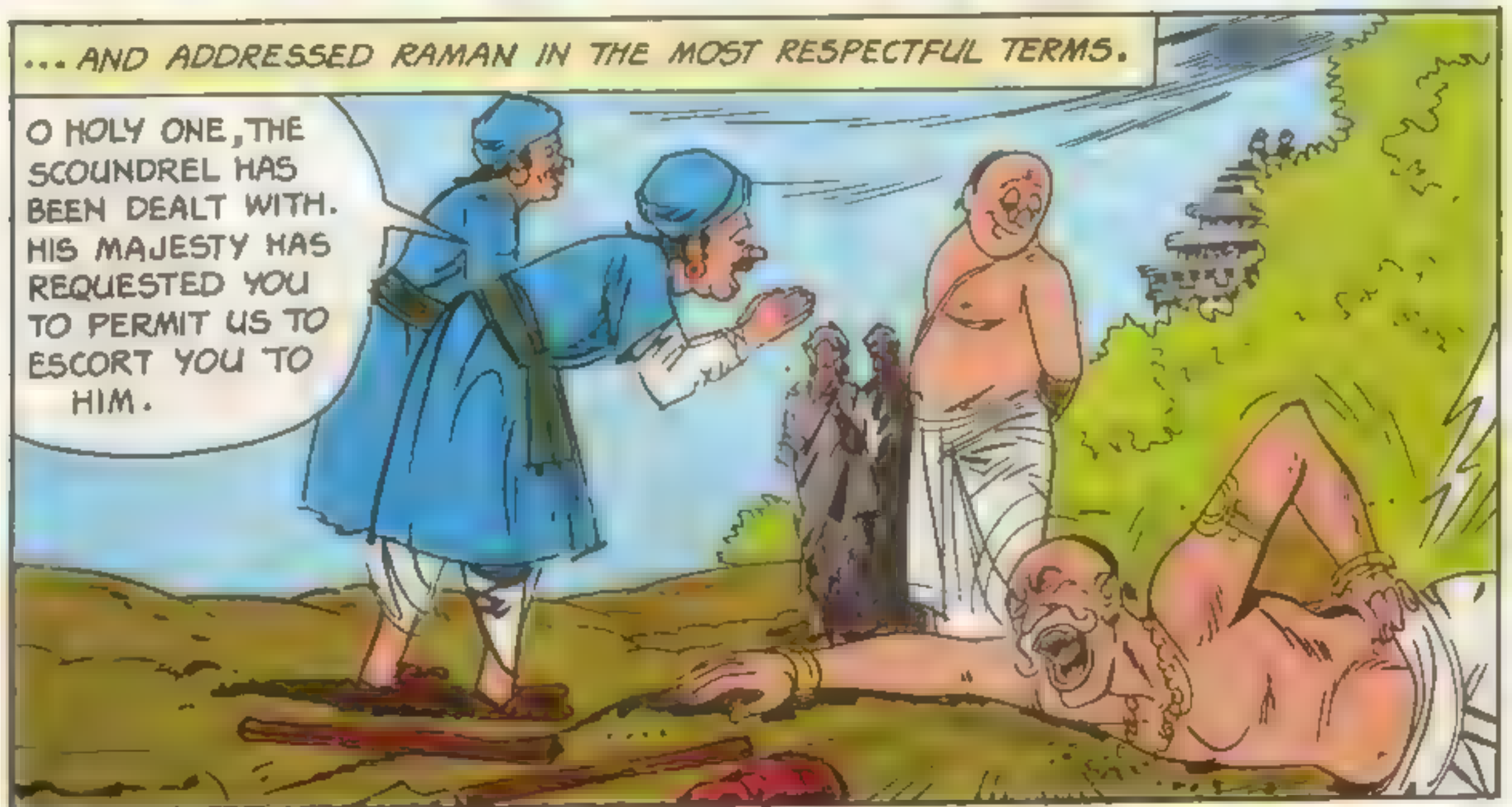


... GAVE HIM A SOUND  
THRASHING ...



... AND ADDRESSED RAMAN IN THE MOST RESPECTFUL TERMS.

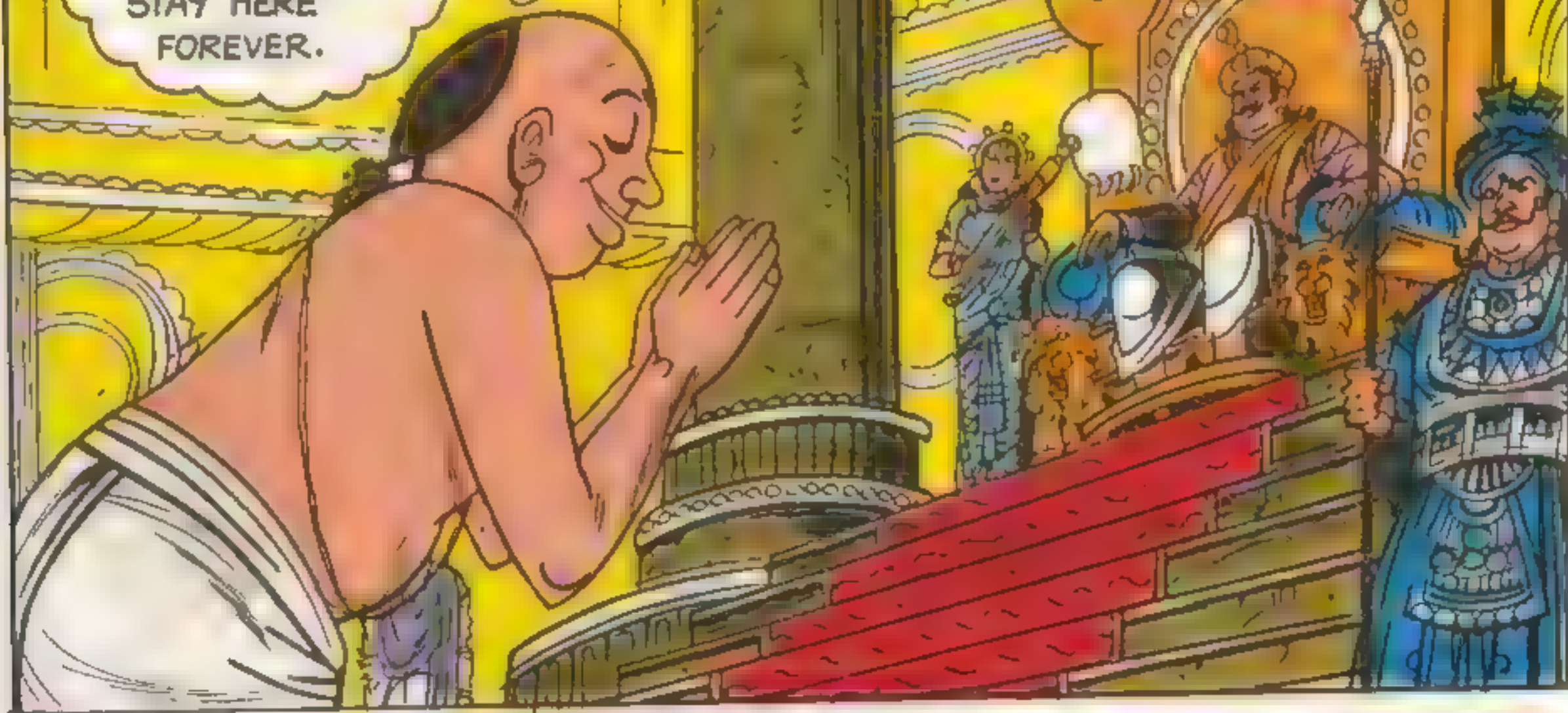
O HOLY ONE, THE  
SCOUNDREL HAS  
BEEN DEALT WITH.  
HIS MAJESTY HAS  
REQUESTED YOU  
TO PERMIT US TO  
ESCORT YOU TO  
HIM.





SOON RAMAN STOOD BEFORE THE KING —

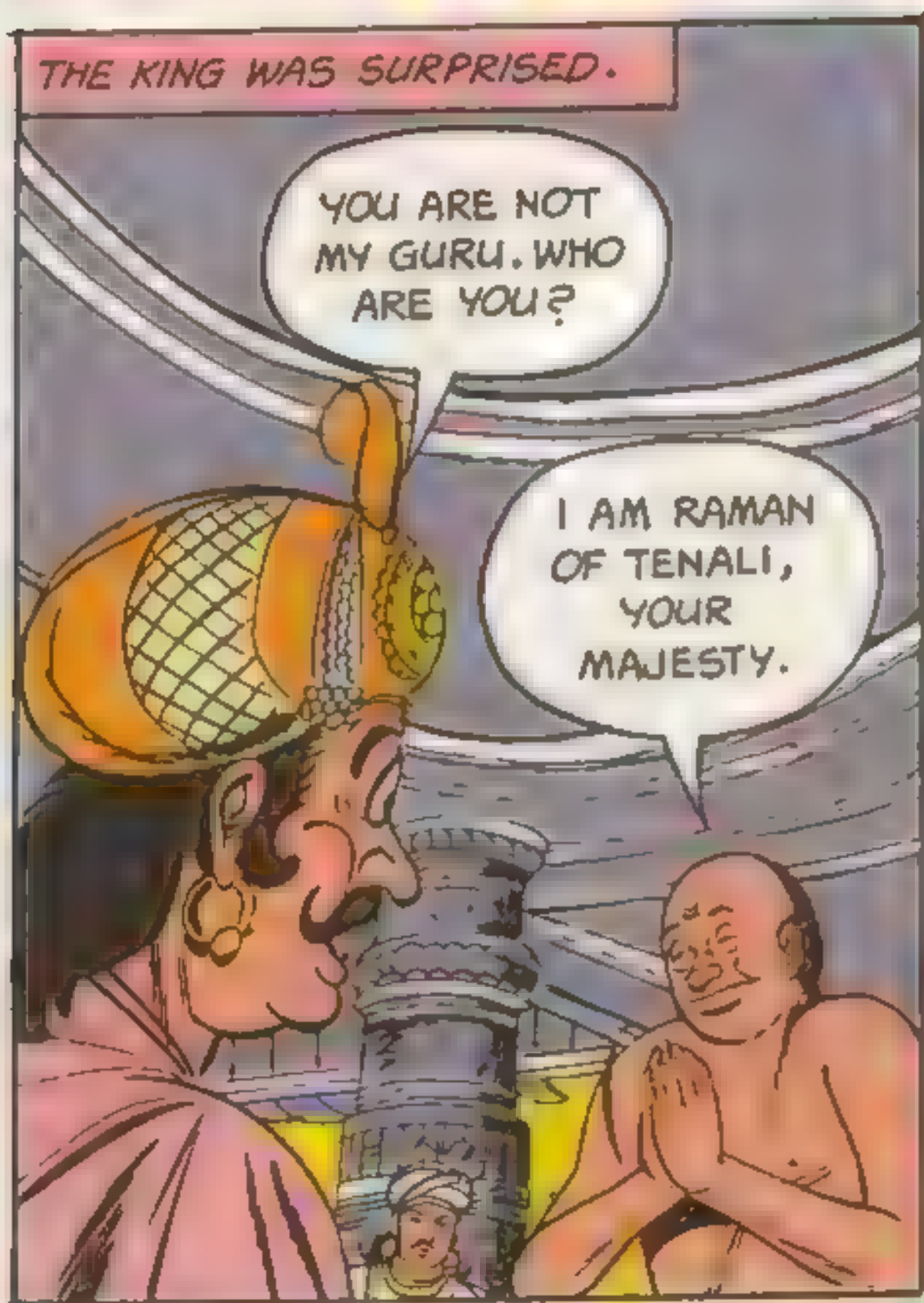
IT'S HAPPENED. I AM  
IN THE COURT OF  
THE GREAT KING —  
AND I MEAN TO  
STAY HERE  
FOREVER.



THE KING WAS SURPRISED.

YOU ARE NOT  
MY GURU. WHO  
ARE YOU?

I AM RAMAN  
OF TENALI,  
YOUR  
MAJESTY.



BUT...HOW...  
WHERE IS THE  
GURU?

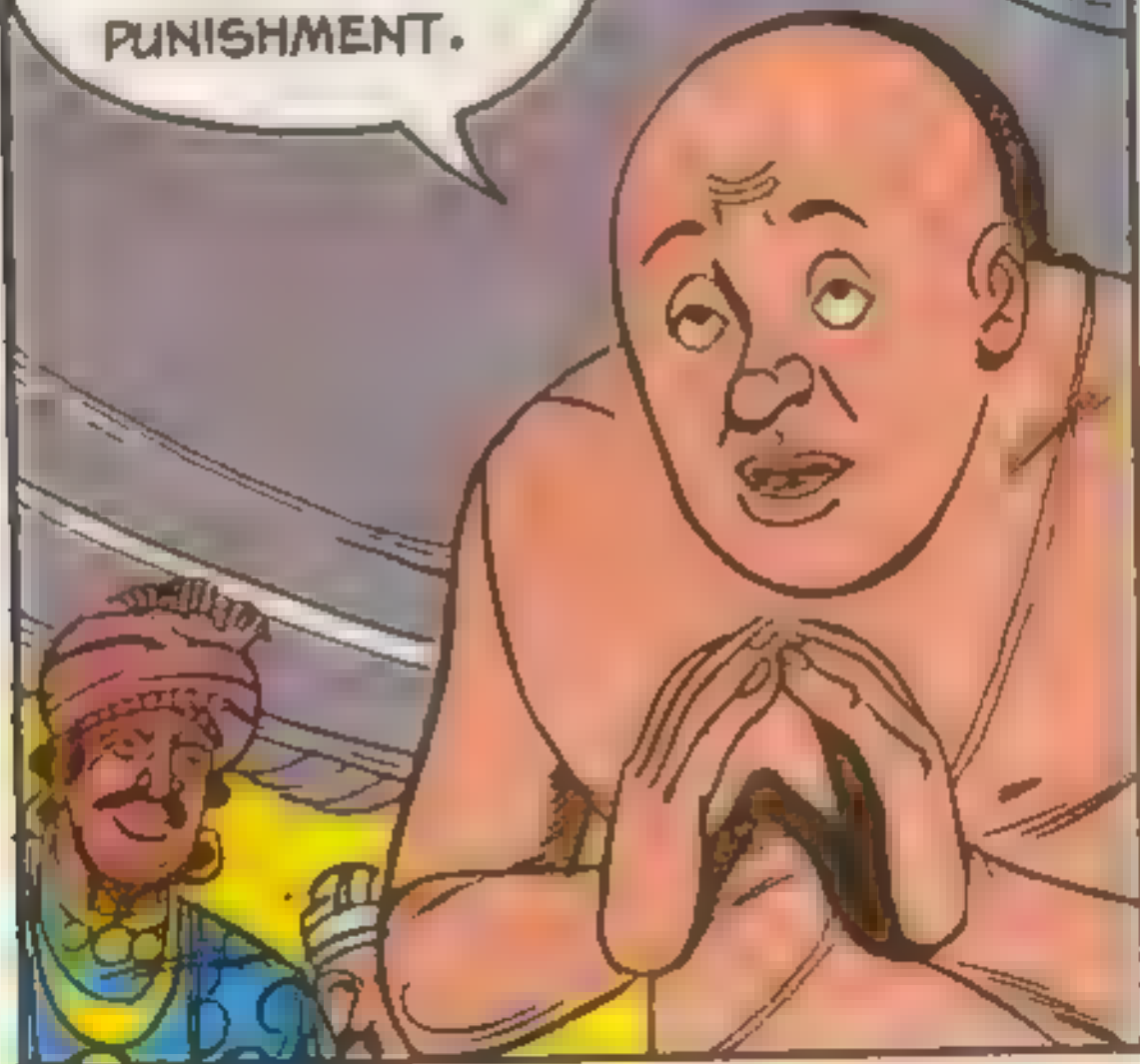
PARDON ME,  
YOUR MAJESTY. BUT  
THE GURU HAS MET  
WITH THE FATE HE  
DESERVED.





AND RAMAN TOLD THE KING ALL ABOUT HIS ENCOUNTER WITH THE GURU. THEN —

IF YOUR MAJESTY DEEMS IT FIT TO PUNISH ME, I'LL TAKE THE PUNISHMENT.

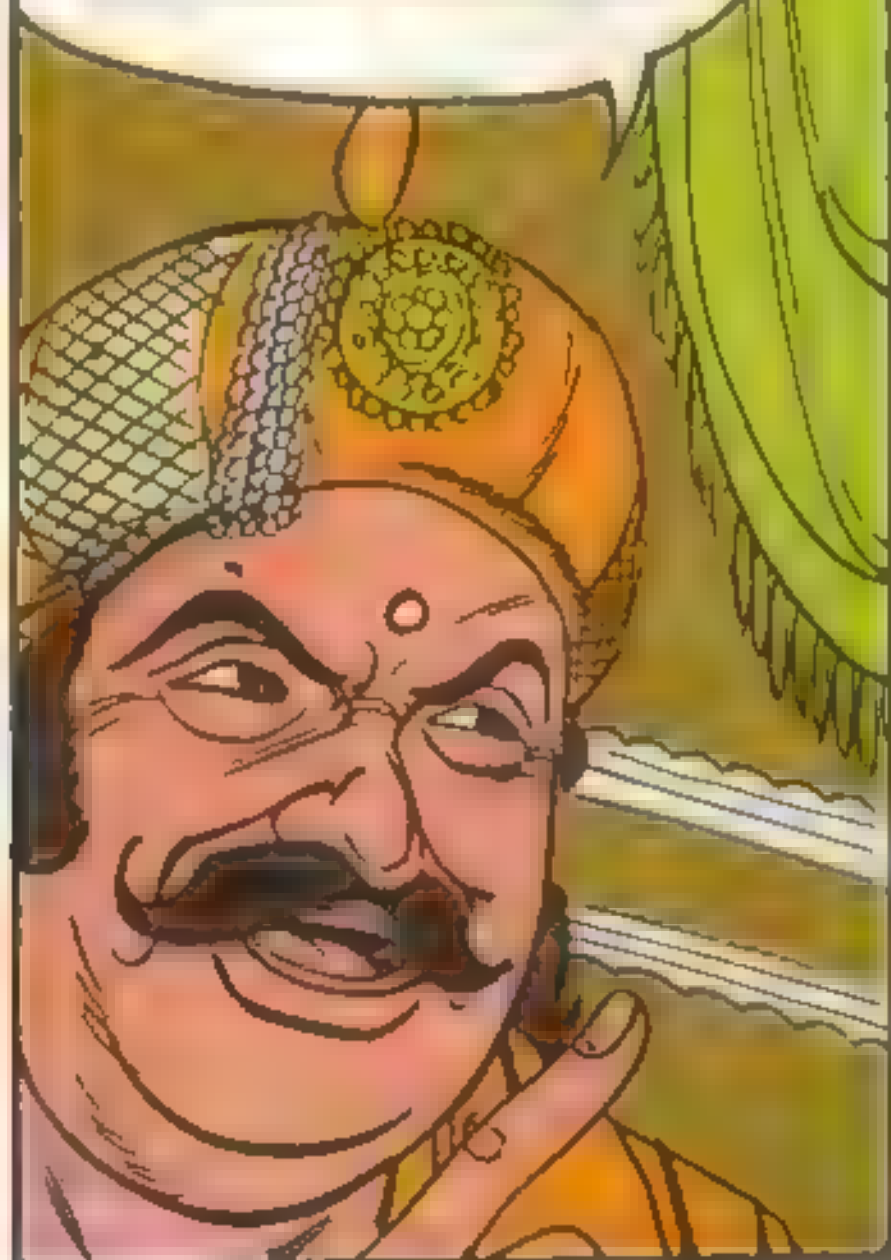


BUT THE KING TOOK AN IMMEDIATE LIKING TO THE BOLD, FRANK, FEARLESS RAMAN.

NO, RAMAN. YOU HAVE DONE NO WRONG. MY COURT COULD DO WITH MEN LIKE YOU. FROM THIS VERY MOMENT I APPOINT YOU MY COURT JESTER! BUT...



...IF AT ANY TIME YOU FORGET YOURSELF AND GO TOO FAR WITH YOUR WIT AND YOUR JOKES, YOU SHALL BE HANGED!



THE KING THEN DIPPED INTO HIS CUMMERBUND AND FISHED OUT A BAG OF GOLD COINS.

TAKE THIS. BUY YOURSELF A HOUSE IN VIJAYANAGARA AND SET UP A HOME.

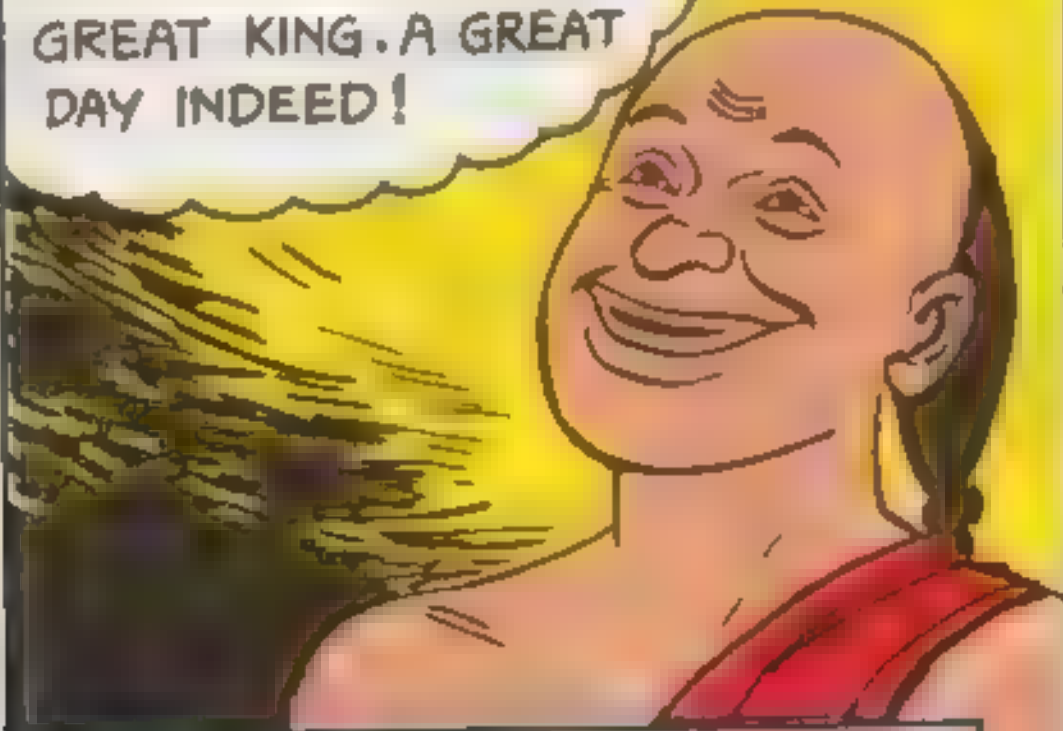
I AM HONOURED, YOUR MAJESTY.





RAMAN COULD HARDLY BELIEVE HIS LUCK.

MY AGED MOTHER AND MY GOOD WIFE WILL BE HAPPY WATCHING ME PROSPER UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF THE GREAT KING. A GREAT DAY INDEED!



THUS DID RAMAN OF TENALI ENTER THE COURT OF THE GREAT KING OF VIJAYANAGARA.

ANXIOUS TO PLEASE THE KING, RAMAN LEFT HOME EARLY EACH MORNING AND RETURNED LATE AT NIGHT. AS HE WAS RETURNING HOME ONE MOONLIT NIGHT—

I HAVE NOT YET FOUND TIME TO WATER MY FIELDS THIS WEEK. TOMORROW I MUST...



SUDDENLY HE STIFFENED. TWO DARK FIGURES, LURKING IN THE SHADOWS, HAD CAUGHT HIS ATTENTION.

THIEVES! THEY DON'T KNOW I'VE SEEN THEM. WELL! WELL! WELL!





HE WALKED STRAIGHT ON TO HIS HOUSE. AS HE ENTERED —

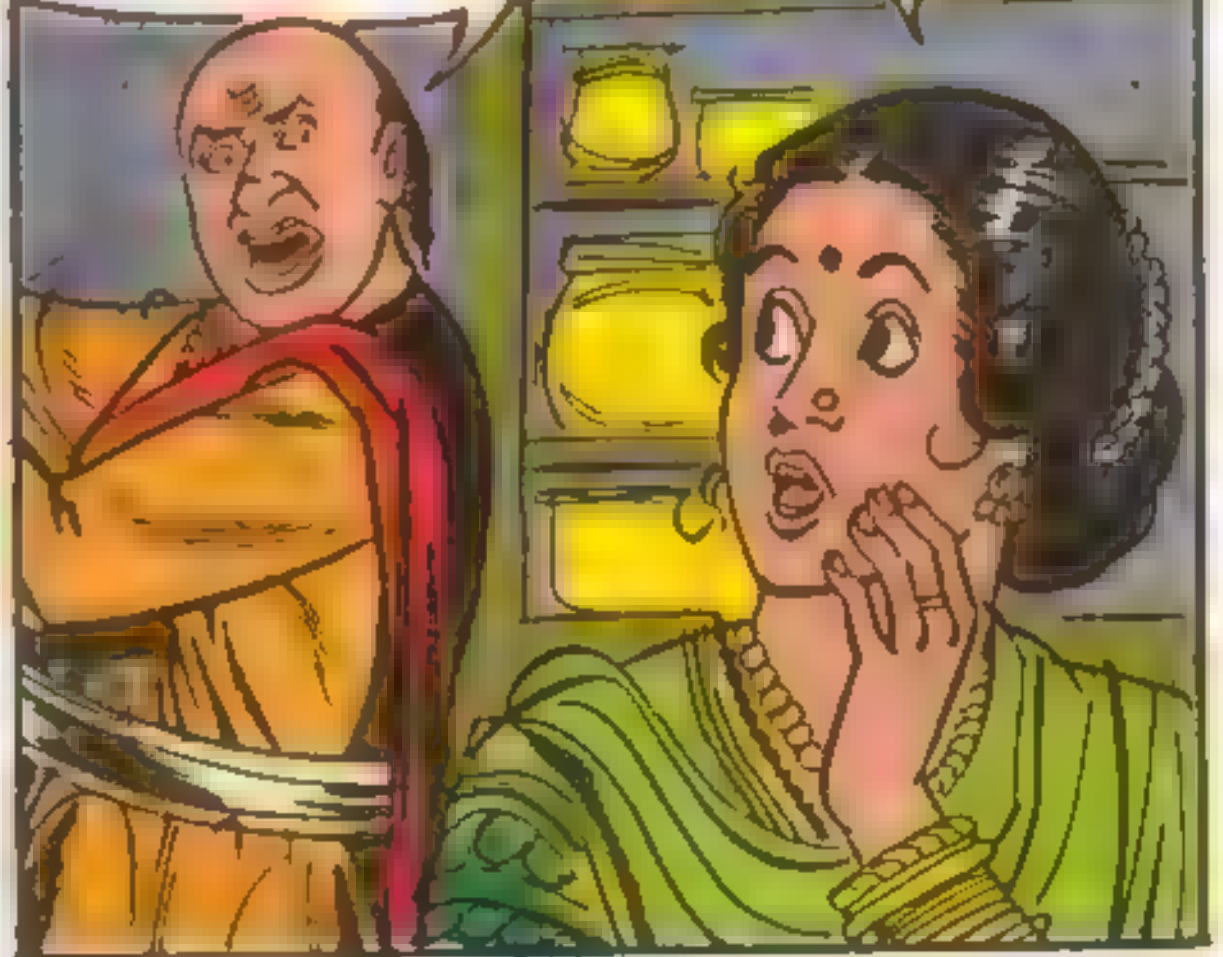
AH! IS THAT YOU?  
YOUR DINNER IS  
COLD. I'LL WARM  
IT UP FOR YOU.



TO HER SURPRISE, RAMAN RAISED HIS VOICE AND ALMOST SHOUTED AT HER.

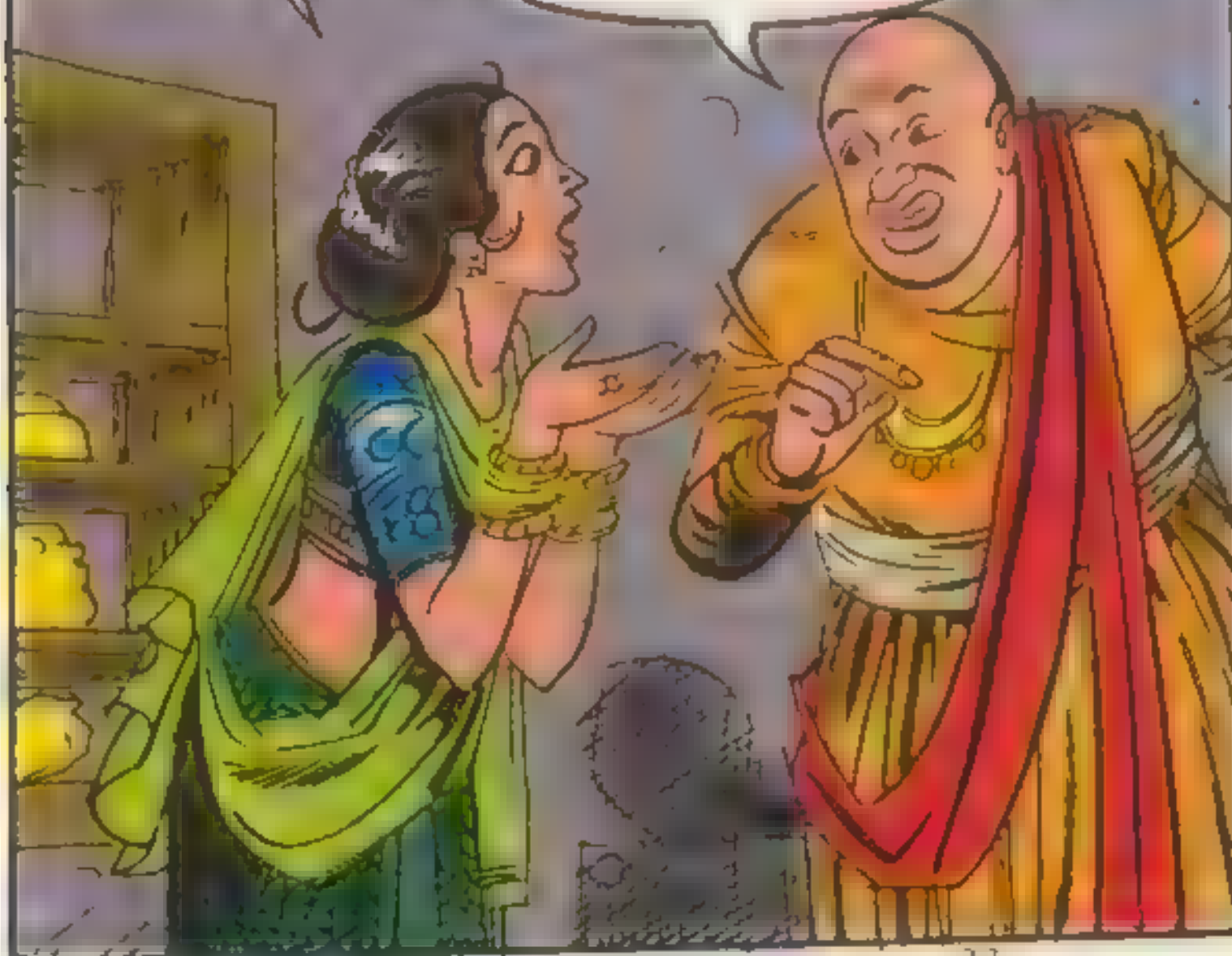
WE HAD A BUSY DAY AT  
COURT. THE CITY IS  
RIDDEN WITH THIEVES  
AND PEOPLE HAVE  
BEEN WARNED TO  
LOCK UP THEIR  
VALUABLES.

OH DEAR!  
WHAT SHALL  
WE DO?



I DON'T EVEN  
LATCH THE  
DOOR TILL  
WE SLEEP.

PUT ALL OUR JEWELLERY,  
SILVERWARE AND MONEY  
INTO A TRUNK AND I'LL  
THROW IT INTO THE  
WELL. NO THIEF WILL  
EVER FIND IT.



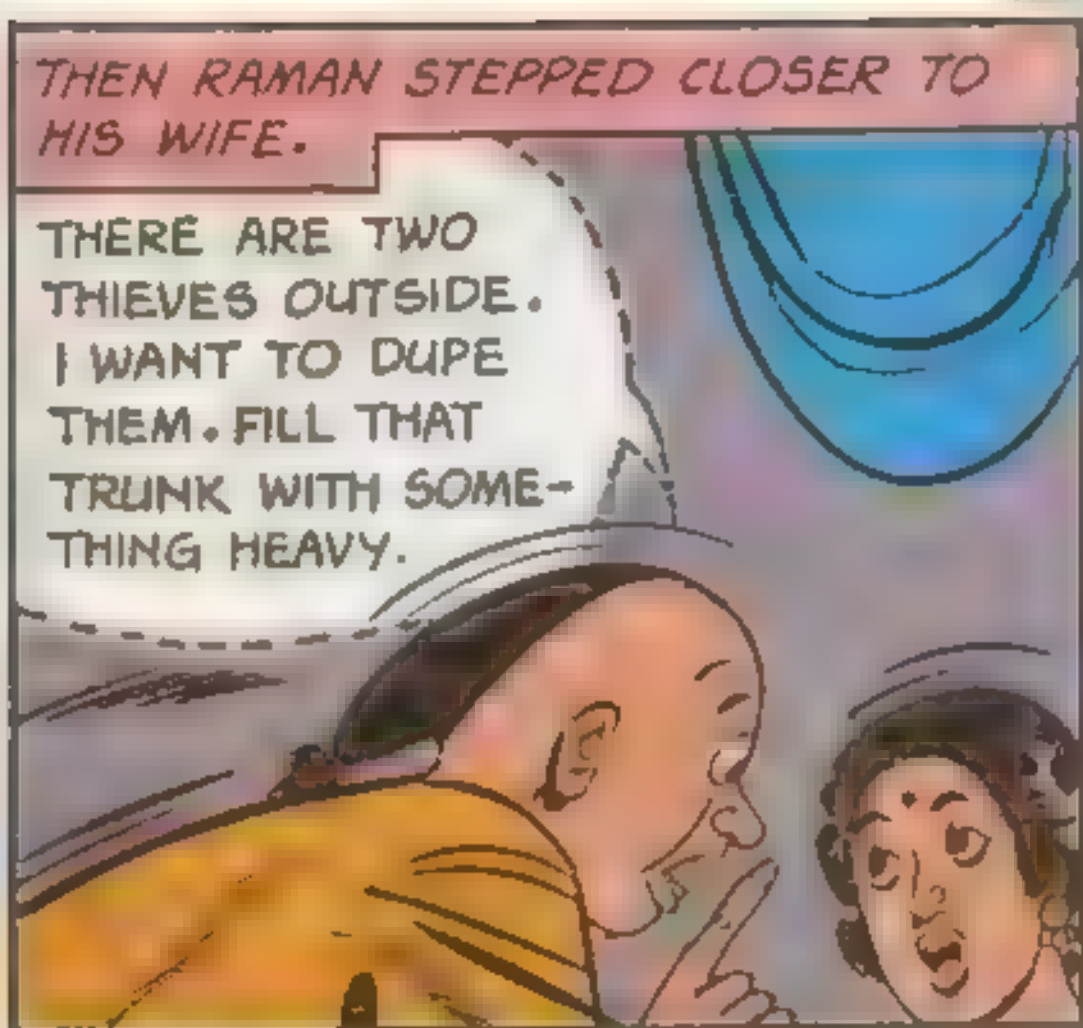
HA! HA!  
THAT'S  
WHAT YOU  
THINK.





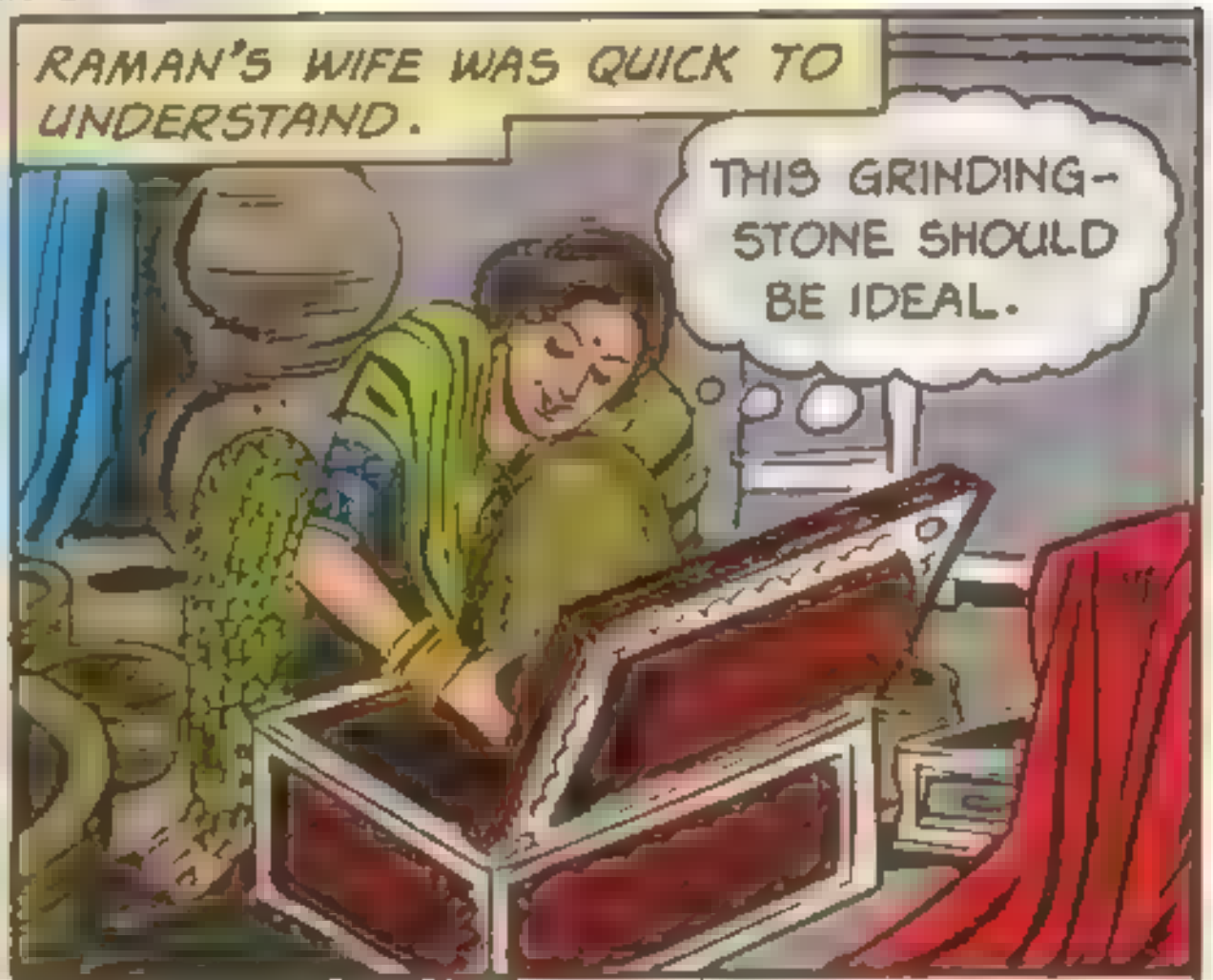
THEN RAMAN STEPPED CLOSER TO HIS WIFE.

THERE ARE TWO THIEVES OUTSIDE. I WANT TO DUPE THEM. FILL THAT TRUNK WITH SOMETHING HEAVY.



RAMAN'S WIFE WAS QUICK TO UNDERSTAND.

THIS GRINDING-STONE SHOULD BE IDEAL.



RAMAN DRAGGED THE TRUNK TO THE WELL...



...AND THREW IT IN, MAKING AS LOUD A SPLASH AS HE COULD.

NOW FOR A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP.



A LITTLE LATER, WHEN THE LAMPS WERE BLOWN OUT IN THE HOUSE —

THEY'VE GONE TO BED. IT'S SAFE TO COME OUT. LET'S GET TO WORK.





THEY WENT UP TO THE WELL AND PEEPED IN.

THERE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE MUCH WATER IN THERE.

GOOD! THAT SHOULD MAKE IT EASIER FOR US.

THE FOOLISH THIEVES BEGAN TO DRAIN THE WELL.



THEY WORKED THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT; BUT IN VAIN.

AH! MY BACK! CAN YOU SEE THE TRUNK?

NO. NOT YET. COME ON. WE MUST NOT GIVE UP NOW.



A LITTLE BEFORE DAWN, RAMAN SAW THAT HIS FIELDS HAD HAD ALL THE WATER THEY NEEDED.

IT'S TIME I RELIEVED THE POOR FOOLS.





HE WENT TO THE WELL.

THANK YOU, MY  
GOOD MEN. YOU  
HAVE DONE A  
FINE JOB!

THE STARTLED THIEVES DROPPED  
THE ROPES...

?!

...AND RAN FOR THEIR LIVES.

HA! HA! HA! WATCH  
THEM RUN!



LATER AT COURT, WHEN RAMAN TOLD THE KING ABOUT HIS NOCTURNAL ADVENTURE—

HA! HA! HA! NOT ONLY DID YOU OUTWIT THE THIEVES BUT YOU MADE THEM WORK FOR YOU. HA! HA! YOU ARE A ROGUE, IF I'VE MET ONE. HA! HA! HA!

AND HE GAVE TENALI A BAG OF GOLD FOR DIVERTING HIS CARE-LADEN MIND WITH THE AMUSING TALE.

AS THE DAYS WENT BY, THE KING FOUND RAMAN MORE AND MORE INDISPENSABLE AND ALL AT COURT BEGAN WONDERING HOW LONG RAMAN'S LUCK WOULD LAST.

WHY HE EVEN DARES TO MAKE THE KING THE BUTT OF HIS JOKES!

ONE DAY HE'LL GO TOO FAR, AND THEN IT WILL BE — "OFF WITH HIS HEAD."

A FEW MONTHS AFTER RAMAN HAD COME TO COURT, THE KING AND HIS QUEEN WERE ABOUT TO VIEW A SPECIAL PERFORMANCE BY A KRISHNALEELA\* TROUPE.

I DO NOT WANT TO BE DISTURBED. LET NO ONE ENTER THE HALL.

A SPECIAL GUARD WAS POSTED AT THE MAIN GATE OF THE PALACE AND ANOTHER AT THE DOOR TO THE HALL.



MEANWHILE RAMAN CAME TO THE PALACE AND WAS ABOUT TO WALK IN AS USUAL, WHEN —

YOU MAY NOT ENTER. THE KING'S ORDERS. HE IS NOT TO BE DISTURBED.



RAMAN'S CURIOSITY WAS AROUSED.

THERE IS SOMETHING SPECIAL GOING ON AND I HAVE NOT BEEN INVITED. I MUST SEE WHAT IT IS!



HE TURNED TO THE GUARDS.

BUT I MUST SEE THE KING. HE HAS PROMISED ME A REWARD AND HAS ASKED ME TO SEE HIM.

THE REWARD MUST BE A BAG OF GOLD AS USUAL.



HE LOOKED GREEDILY AT RAMAN.

ALL RIGHT! WHAT WILL YOU GIVE ME IF I LET YOU ENTER?

HALF OF WHAT THE KING GIVES ME.





THAT WAS EXACTLY WHAT THE GUARD WANTED TO HEAR.

YOU MAY GO IN, THEN.  
BUT REMEMBER—  
HALF OF WHAT YOU  
GET IS FOR ME.

I'D BETTER RUN  
IN BEFORE HE  
CHANGES HIS  
MIND!



WHEN HE REACHED THE DOOR  
TO THE AUDIENCE HALL —

STOP! YOU  
MAY NOT  
ENTER.

PLEASE DON'T STOP  
ME. THE KING HAS  
SENT FOR ME TO  
COLLECT A  
REWARD.



A  
REWARD?

LET ME ENTER  
AND I'LL GIVE  
YOU HALF OF  
WHAT THE KING  
GIVES ME.



ALL RIGHT. BUT  
DON'T FORGET...  
HALF OF WHAT  
THE KING GIVES  
YOU...

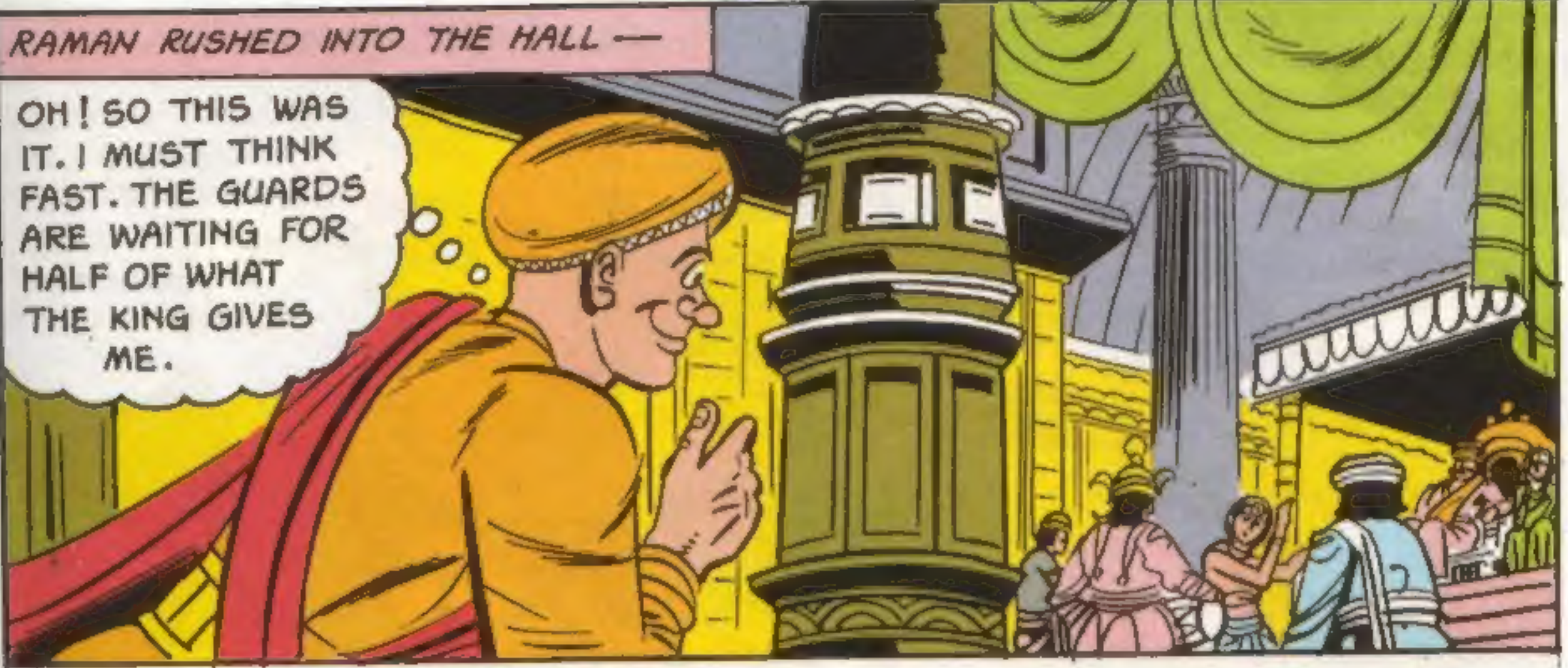
... IS  
YOURS!





RAMAN RUSHED INTO THE HALL —

OH! SO THIS WAS IT. I MUST THINK FAST. THE GUARDS ARE WAITING FOR HALF OF WHAT THE KING GIVES ME.



HE RAN UP TO THE PLAYERS...

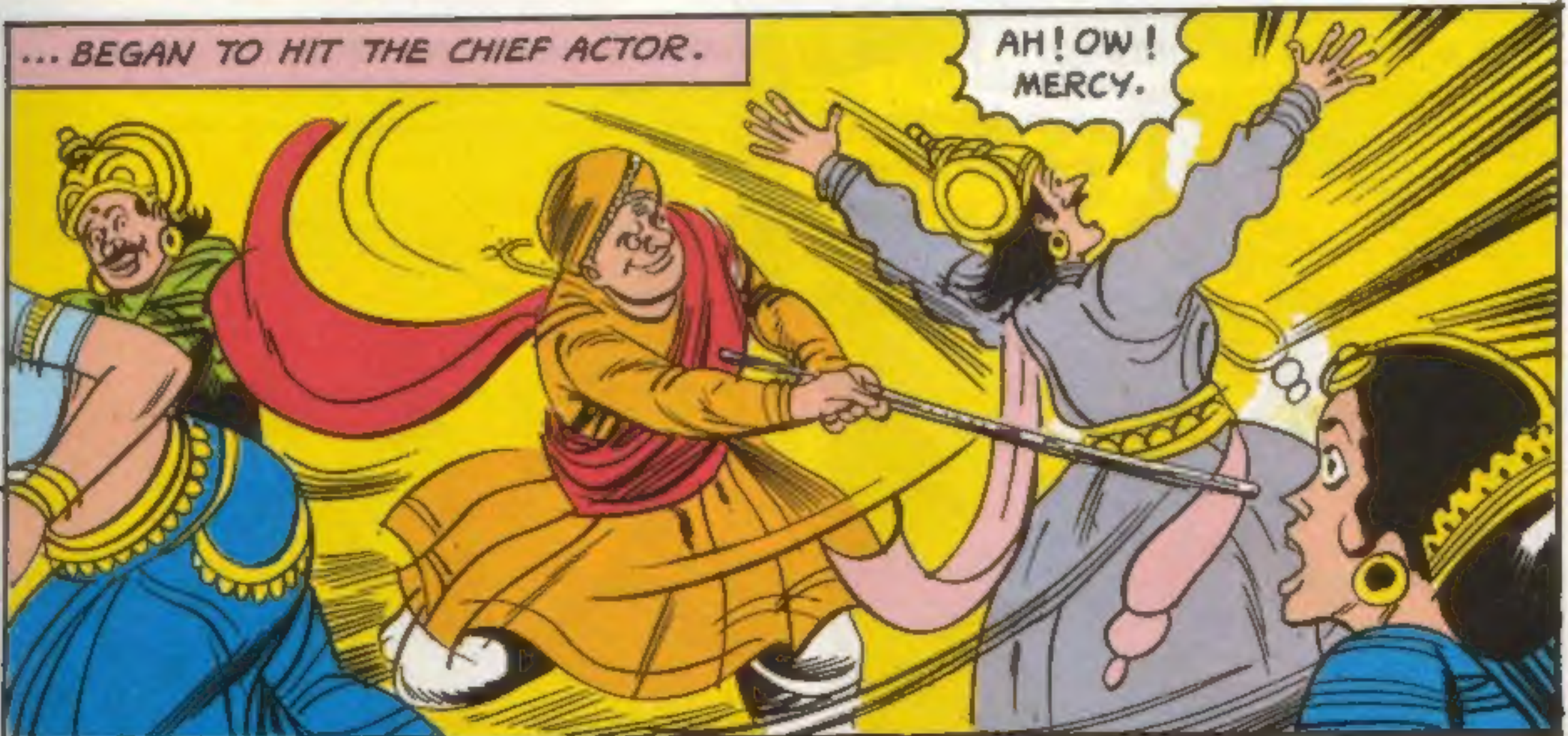


...AND PICKING UP A STICK...



... BEGAN TO HIT THE CHIEF ACTOR.

AH! OW! MERCY.





RAMAN! STOP IT!  
HAVE YOU GONE  
MAD? HOW  
DARE YOU  
DISTURB THE  
PERFORMANCE.



HE TURNED TO HIS ATTENDANTS.

BRING THAT  
FOOL BEFORE  
ME.



WHEN RAMAN WAS DRAGGED BEFORE HIM —

YOU HAVE GONE A BIT TOO  
FAR, RAMAN. YOU SHALL  
RECEIVE A HUNDRED  
LASHES FOR THIS  
IMPUDENCE.



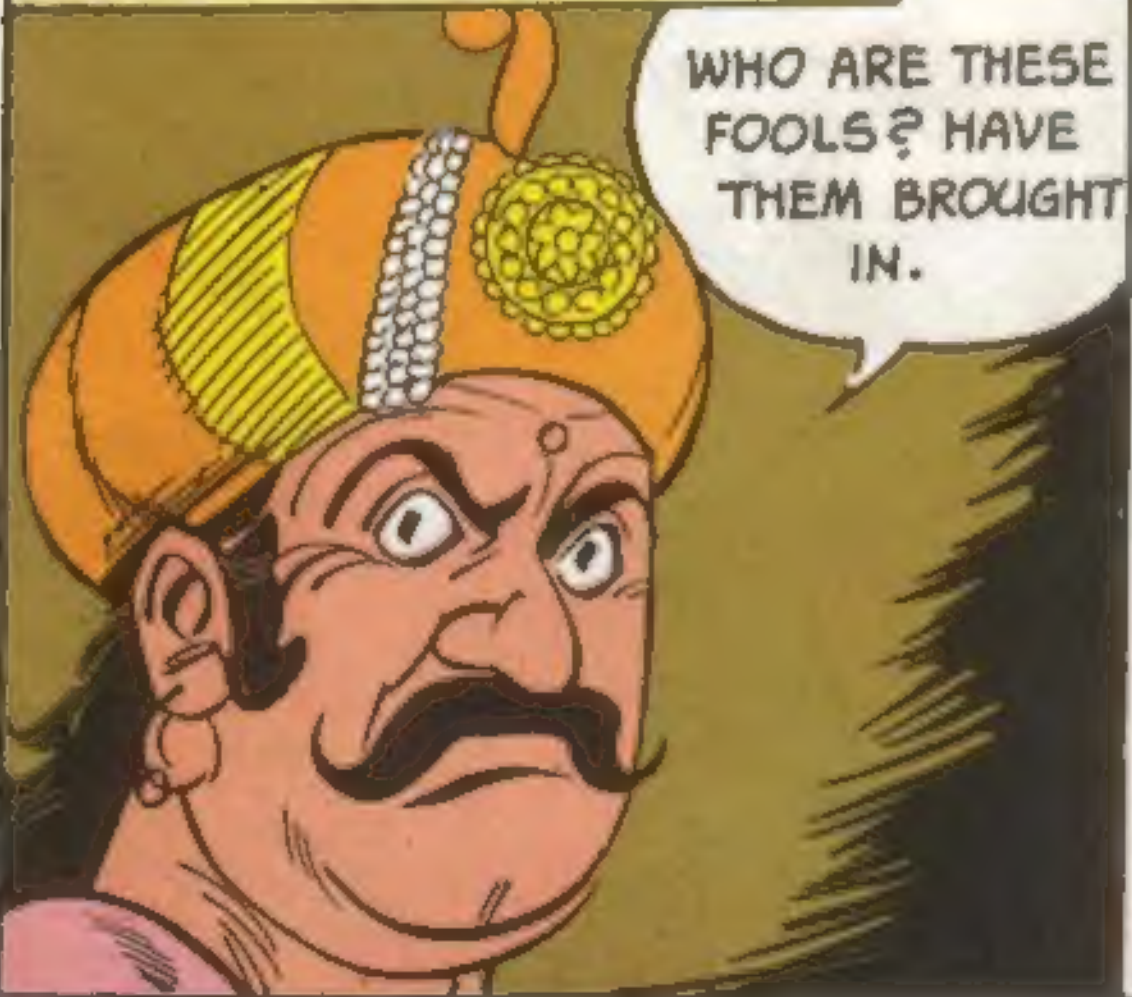
AS AN ATTENDANT RAISED THE WHIP —

PLEASE WAIT, YOUR  
MAJESTY. I HAVE TWO  
FRIENDS OUTSIDE WHO  
WANT TO SHARE THE  
LASHES.



THE KING WAS ASTONISHED.

WHO ARE THESE  
FOOLS? HAVE  
THEM BROUGHT  
IN.



RAMAN WHISPERED SOMETHING  
INTO THE ATTENDANT'S EAR.





THE ATTENDANT RETURNED WITH THE TWO GUARDS.

MY GUARDS? WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS, RAMAN? DO YOU WANT TO BE BEHEADED?



I AM HONOUR BOUND TO SHARE WITH THEM WHAT YOU WISH TO GIVE ME.



AND HE TOLD THE KING HOW HE HAD GAINED ENTRY INTO THE PALACE AND THE AUDIENCE HALL.

THE KING WAS AT ONCE ANGRY AND AMUSED. ANGRY WITH THE DISHONEST GUARDS AND AMUSED BY RAMAN'S WIT.



HOW DARE YOU ALLOW YOURSELVES TO BE BRIBED INTO DISOBEYING MY ORDERS!

HE TURNED TO THE ATTENDANTS.



GIVE THEM FIFTY LASHES EACH AND DISMISS THEM.

THEN HE TURNED TO RAMAN.



I AM GRATEFUL TO YOU, RAMAN, FOR EXPOSING THESE ROGUES. YOU SHALL RECEIVE A BAG OF GOLD FOR YOUR EFFORTS.

THUS DID RAMAN EARN AS USUAL, NOT ONLY THE KING'S FORGIVENESS BUT ALSO A REWARD.